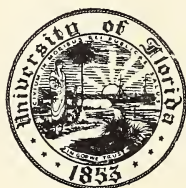




UNIVERSITY  
OF FLORIDA  
LIBRARIES



COLLEGE LIBRARY





*Later Critiques*



# LATER CRITIQUES

BY  
AUGUSTUS RALLI

*Essay Index Reprint Series*



BOOKS FOR LIBRARIES PRESS  
FREEPORT, NEW YORK

First Published 1933  
Reprinted 1968



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER:  
68-26469

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



## CONTENTS

	PAGE
CARLYLE AND SHAKESPEARE . . .	I
SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM . . .	19
THE USES OF THE CLASSICS . . .	41
SHAKESPEARE'S SONGS . . .	53
FACT AND FICTION . . .	69
ON READING . . .	81
EDUCATION . . .	93
THE VICTORIAN AGE . . .	107



*Carlyle and Shakespeare*



## CARLYLE AND SHAKESPEARE<sup>1</sup>

CARLYLE is reputed to be the third greatest biographer in the world, only surpassed by Plutarch and Boswell. As the duty of a biographer is to portray character, a comparison with Shakespeare may teach us something of the mind of both. It is usually said that we do not know Shakespeare the man because he was the perfect artist ; and it may be suggested that we know Carlyle too well because he was imperfect as an artist. This also is true, for even if we had not the countless biographies and collections of letters, the imprint left by Carlyle's own nature upon every page of his formal writings is unmistakable. Every student knows that the character of artist is one that Carlyle would have repudiated with scorn ; and yet had it not been for his incomparable artistry, his works would have passed into oblivion. Like Balaam, his curse was converted into a blessing by a power above him ; and our present object is to discover him as one of the finest of artists—especially in portraying character—but compelled by the conditions of his time first to despise art, and secondly to use art as social propaganda, with the result that the still mirror is clouded with earthly breath and reflects a distorted world.

It may appear strange to complain that Carlyle expressed too much of himself, especially in view of modern literary tendencies. But our argument is that, through concern for the sufferings of his fellow-men, he sacrificed the immortal part of himself to the mortal and hindered the full culmination of his genius. To decide on the nature of that kind of self-expression which is foreign to

<sup>1</sup> A paper read before the Carlyle Society, Edinburgh.

## CARLYLE AND SHAKESPEARE

art, we must thread our way through a variety of seeming contradictions and inconsistencies.

Newman said that a gentleman never speaks of himself ; yet Leslie Stephen affirmed autobiography to be the most fascinating form of literature. Louis Racine complained that La Fontaine put nothing of his own into his conversation ; but Dr. Johnson once rebuked Boswell for making a personal matter of everything. Lytton Strachey, writing of Hume, says that no one was ever freer from the personal and particular, or practised with greater success the "divine art of impartiality" ; and he calls this art "the antithesis of the bestial". On the other hand, it is sometimes said that history, in modern scientific hands, has lost its savour ; and laments are heard for the pro-Athenian fervour of Grote or the anti-Christian irony of Gibbon. Dryden censured the opinions of Lucretius on the mortality of the soul as absurd, and concluded that he was too eager to instruct—in short, so much an atheist that he forgot sometimes to be a poet.

These last sentences lead us to the heart of the matter—the antithesis between opinion and the knowledge born of spiritual experience. When Lucretius uttered his experience he was a poet, when he uttered his opinions he was a sceptic. Carlyle tells us that when he first met Sterling they walked westward together, "arguing copiously, but *except* in opinion not disagreeing". Another of Newman's sayings is that a gentleman never inflicts pain ; and it is a fact that it is painful to hear an opinion strongly expressed, whether we agree with it or not, and that it challenges contradiction. The reason is that opinion belongs to the earthly part of us, to man before he has made his soul, intent on the struggle for existence and self-preservation, more ready to do evil than good to his fellow-creatures. It is only after this struggle has been relaxed for some generations, and men's thoughts abstracted from their bodily needs, that society in the true sense can exist ; and to this higher life art belongs, so that when a writer intrudes his opinions into his works he is himself condemn-

## CARLYLE AND SHAKESPEARE

ing them to mortality. Fanny Burney, who was present at the trial, described the effect of Burke's eloquence as so overpowering that she could not even bear to glance at a man so accused as Warren Hastings. But when the orator concluded his narrative and made charges of rapacity, cruelty, tyranny, without fact or illustration, and with the violence of personal hatred, the spell was broken, and she became a mere spectator in a public place.

We may class as the literature of opinion all books written with a moral purpose, and may note Professor Bradley's conjecture that Shakespeare disliked persons who acted on principle, and also the views of many critics, including Mr. J. W. Mackail, that Shakespeare had not a forceful personality. Because he was the perfect artist he withheld his opinions, and we do not know him, though his characters speak on all subjects. It is otherwise with Milton whose opinions became more accentuated with advancing years, so that his last works survive by their grand harmonies rather than their philosophy. In his early poems Milton loved the beauties of nature ; in *Paradise Lost* this love is transferred to the great actions of man under the eye of God ; but in *Paradise Regained* and *Samson* the veil of poetry is darkened with the angry hue of earth. The absolutely uncompromising answers returned by our Lord to Satan and Samson to Dalila are those of one in whom thought has reverted to opinion, who will not be turned from his purpose by any human sympathy or weakness. Socrates in the *Phaedo* (91 A.) discussing the soul's immortality, admits that since he is shortly to die, he has not the temper of a philosopher, but like the vulgar is only a partisan. The partisan, he says, cares nothing about the rights of a question, but only seeks to convince his hearers of his own assertions.

And yet this attitude of keeping an open mind on all questions is not approved by Professor Saintsbury. According to him, most men of genius or even talent will find " in certain of the great primeval creeds of the world, political, ecclesiastical, literary, or other, something which



## CARLYLE AND SHAKESPEARE

suits their bent ". It is not this class, he thinks, but the other who will "swallow formulas ", and easily get rid of them by a "mental emetic ", and then "swallow another set, which will very likely be subjected to the same fate ". We will just mention that this bears some resemblance to an opinion expressed by one of the speakers in the dialogue of Plato already mentioned (85 C-D), that it is hard or rather impossible to attain certainty about ultimate questions ; therefore the enquirer should take the best and hardest to disprove of human doctrines and use it as a raft to sail through life, in default of a divine revelation. And yet we have only to call up the names of some of Professor Saintsbury's critical equals of the present and last generation to decide that if they nearly always give pleasure and he fairly often gives pain, it is in this very certainty, in this intrusion of opinion, that is not in the works of Bradley, Mackail, Myers, Arnold (except on translating Homer), Leslie Stephen, Bagehot, Pater.

The part-exception of Arnold raises the question how far Swinburne was right when he explained Arnold's hatred of Philistines by the fact that he came of Philistine stock—David the son of Goliath : as it has been said that Flaubert had a bourgeois horror of the bourgeois. Thomas Arnold may have had such a side to his nature, but we can hardly account as a Philistine the author of some of the most living prose and most moving prayers in the language. However, Swinburne's words are not to be lightly dismissed, and we therefore conclude that if Matthew Arnold could be the perfect critic, he was less perfect in his dealings with his weaker critical brethren. If in his purely literary judgments he withheld his opinions and used his true experience—his "sweetness and light"—he showed too much earthly feeling against those who confused their experience and opinions : and another instance of this is his essay on the French Academy.

But of the literature of opinion there is no stronger example than John Morley. His books instructed and



## CARLYLE AND SHAKESPEARE

stimulated his generation, but are doomed to oblivion because they owed their power to opinion only : so much so that when he suppresses opinion, as in his *Life of Gladstone*, the result is little better than a compilation, and the book fails in the first duty of a work of art, that of exciting interest. Of a book lately published on Rousseau, one of Morley's subjects, *The Times* said that Morley was shocked by Rousseau's manner of life, and the present author, Mr. C. E. Vulliamy, was shocked by Morley's pomposity. Our sympathies certainly are with Mr. Vulliamy when he re-criticises Morley's criticism of Rousseau's "absence of healthy power of reaction against moral shock", and Morley's assertion that "the urgent demands for material activity quickly recall the mass of men to normal relations with their fellows and the outer world".<sup>1</sup> We will turn to an earlier and greater figure in the history of letters, to Macaulay, in whom the expression of opinion sometimes degenerated into abuse, notably in the essay on Boswell and Johnson. After remarking that many of the greatest men who ever lived have written biography, he adds, "Boswell was one of the smallest men that ever lived, and he has beaten them all". He continues, "Servile and impertinent, shallow and pedantic, a bigot and a sot . . ." These are but a selection of scores of kindred epithets which he has lavished on his subject, but while they have long ceased to do that subject harm, they continue to harm their author and hasten the crumbling of his reputation. Macaulay concludes that "Boswell has used many people ill, but assuredly nobody so ill as himself". At this time of day we can re-write the sentence with Macaulay's name in place of Boswell's.

As literature and life can never be parted, we will take a literary-biographical instance. When Emerson visited Carlyle at Craigenputtock in 1833, there was delight on both sides. "He seemed", wrote Carlyle,

<sup>1</sup> It is amusing to read in Lord Crewe's *Life of Rosebery* (Vol. I, p. 480), Morley's objection to Rosebery's book on Pitt, that it showed "too great a desire to impress not only the author's meaning, but his opinion".

## CARLYLE AND SHAKESPEARE

"to be one of the most lovable creatures in himself we had ever looked on. He stayed till next day with us, and talked and heard talk to his heart's content". Fourteen years later this visit was repeated at Chelsea with indifferent success. "His doctrines are too airy and thin" was the Carlylean verdict. "We had immense talking with him here, but found he did not give us much to chew the cud upon". And also, "Good of him I could get none, except from his friendly looks and elevated exotic polite ways". At the age of thirty-seven Carlyle was still young enough to delight in gaining a new friend, but at fifty-one his nature had settled deeper in earth, as we saw with Milton in his later poems : from which we deduce that opinion is strong or weak according as man's earthly nature is in the ascendant or decline. Here we see the spiritual joys of friendship over-clouded by matters of the pure intellect, and also the partisan spirit recorded by Plato, which dislikes contradiction and wishes to enforce its assertions.

If opinion is strong in age rather than youth, the credit is not wholly to the latter. As age creeps on and vitality declines, the weight of this fleshly garment so increases that the fire of the spirit hardly shines through its thickening walls. The joyousness and freedom from care of youth are often due to mere physical vitality, which makes it easy to bear the weight of the flesh, rather than to positive spiritual activity. The smile which transfigures the countenance may be a false guide with youth, suggesting an inner beauty that does not belong to the individual, but is a sure guide with one in whom youth is past : as the sunset works a greater miracle in transfiguring the ploughed field than the fresh parterre. One of the duties of art is so to feed the fire of the spirit that it continues to glow steadily through the autumn and winter of our lives.

In deciding that opinion is an earthly matter—a proof that in literature and life the material is overcoming the spiritual—we are faced with a great contradiction in the lives of literary men. The poets furnish us with examples

## CARLYLE AND SHAKESPEARE

of the predominance of the earthly self that we do not find in men of action. We recall Milton's violence in controversy, the small vanities of Voltaire and Pope, the antics of Boswell and Goldsmith, the careers of Burns and Byron and many others. The answer is that, by the law of compensation, the elaborate nervous constitution of men of imaginative genius and their volcanic passions, make it harder for them to comply with earthly conditions than ordinary mortals. If they are super-human in their works, they are often sub-human in their lives. Swinburne accused Arnold of part-Philistinism, but so impatient was he himself of contradiction, so intolerant of those who held opposite views, that his own critical manners are the reverse of perfect. The earthly reactions of a great poet's sensibility frequently degrade him below the level of a Philistine. Carlyle himself said that the lives of literary men are the saddest reading outside the Newgate Calendar.

And yet even when an author is artist enough not to intrude his opinions into his work, they none the less exist, except in a few cases such as Shakespeare. When we say we do not know Shakespeare we mean that we do not know his opinions. We do not know the earthly bounds to his thoughts—the occasions when, in the words of Socrates, he has exchanged the temper of a philosopher for that of a partisan. Even the world of Dante rests on the tortoise of opinion, since, as Hazlitt remarked, he has put half his private acquaintance into the Inferno. It was said that Goethe spoke of no one with asperity, and his world, more akin to the Shakespearian, circles in detached mystery round the sun of pure mind. Smaller worlds, but sufficient to themselves and therefore artistically perfect, are those of Scott and Jane Austen. Scott found his happiness in absorbing the romantic legends of the past, Jane Austen found hers in family life; and in both the absence of literary ambitions and jealousies helped to suppress the struggling earthly self. There are greater writers than these two but few more perfect,



## CARLYLE AND SHAKESPEARE

if we may judge by the total impression of their collected works rather than details of style.

One cause of the happiness of the Austen family was that they never argued or disputed. The thoughts born of competition and hostility between human beings found in them no congenial soil. In most cases the pressure of the world upon the body so affects the soul as to limit its power to experience divine things ; and these limitations are the clue to its earthly history. Thus Thackeray saw society as *Vanity Fair* ; Byron and Rousseau read their private feelings into nature. Dante's political feuds, Milton's unhappy marriage, are to be traced in their works. In life we see that a man's character may be influenced for the worse by his profession,—that there are certain false values into which the politician, the lawyer, the man of business, may be entrapped. The need for earthly self-preservation encroaches like a shadow over the white expanse of the soul and hinders its power to experience. Most men, failing divine revelation, take kindly to the best human doctrine at their disposal and use it as a raft to sail through life.

It follows that in life as in art the rule of progress is that the earthly barriers of the soul be levelled. We saw with Jane Austen how much the perfection of her art owed to her manner of life. There can be no spiritual life, no society in the highest sense, until the need for competition, for earthly self-preservation, is reduced. Yet the question rises : to what goal will this search for the universal lead ? If all minds became as disinterested as Shakespeare's, if all competition were suppressed among men, what would become of the world as we know it ? One of the charms of biography is the discovery of its subject's earthly self, as a contrast to his achievements in thought or action. Remove Dr. Johnson's prejudices and strange habits and bursts of temper from Boswell's record, and the savour is gone. We do not know Shakespeare, but we wish to know him : and thus our curiosity about the partisan is equal to our curiosity about the philos-

## CARLYLE AND SHAKESPEARE

opher. Carlyle censured the biography of his day as "mealy-mouthed", and Froude, interpreting this too literally, produced the work that has been such a storm centre.

Holders of opposite opinions have claimed Shakespeare as one of themselves—Roman Catholics, Protestants, agnostics. He has been called anti-Puritan—yet in Malvolio he created a gentleman. So many critics have emphasised his hatred of the mob that here we seem to be on surer ground : yet the Patricians in *Coriolanus* cut sorrier figures than the Plebeians. When Coriolanus is appointed Consul by the Senate but is told that before the election is confirmed he must seek the people's voices, he proceeds to do so in a most ungracious manner. To his question of the price of the consulship, a citizen replies, "The price is to ask it kindly". No king or leader among Shakespeare's characters has ever addressed a more dignified rebuke. The riddle of Shakespeare's personality remains insoluble because we cannot detect the partisan. The earthly barriers of his soul are pushed so far back that not a shadow falls on its white expanse.

Why then are we not satisfied with knowing Shakespeare's universal mind but we wish also to know his opinions ? The answer is that this world is best defined as the vale of soul-making, that its joys and sorrows have a part to play in evolving the soul, and that the basis of mental life—its most rudimentary form—is opinion. We wish to know the opinions of a great man in order to guide our own development—to watch the stages by which they have become dissolved in the universal, or, in our modern phrase, sublimated. Shakespeare achieved complete sublimation, Carlyle only partial. It is our business, using his biography as a key to his works, to explain this partial failure.

The process of meditation, whereby man's individual knowledge mingles with the universal, has been defined by Plato. Recognition of beauty begins with fair forms, rises to fair minds, and thence, through the beauty of laws and institutions and the sciences, upward to uni-

## CARLYLE AND SHAKESPEARE

versal beauty. The extent to which a writer has sublimated his knowledge is the measure of his worth. If we look back to the two whom we selected as examples of the literature of opinion we shall see that they did not deal in meditation. Macaulay was an omnivorous reader but a slight thinker. His mind retained undissolved every word that entered it. He could have rewritten *Sir Charles Grandison* from memory. He read when he was out walking, and in India he devoured hundreds of inferior novels rather than be left alone with his mind. All through his works Morley exalts the man of action at the expense of the thinker. He derides the person "who lives in a back garden and constructs past, present, and future out of his inner consciousness". Although a Wordsworthian, he was evidently ignorant of the truth of Wordsworth's lines, that no experience exceeds in awe that of looking into the abyss of our own mind. These are extreme instances, and perhaps we may learn more from Charlotte Brontë who idealised her experience of human passion in the portraits of Rochester and Paul Emanuel, but betrayed her private sensibilities in drawing the unfortunate curates. When she speaks of Mr. Donne's "harsh voice and vulgarly presumptuous and familiar style", she is abusive like Macaulay on Boswell. We will now endeavour to understand where Carlyle succeeded and where he failed, and the reasons for his failure.

Recognition of beauty, according to Plato, begins with fair forms, and he adds that "in the attainment of this end human nature will not easily find a helper better than love" (*Symposium* 212 B.). In approaching the episode of Blumine in *Sartor*, Carlyle writes: "Nowhere to the young man does this heaven on earth so immediately reveal itself as in the young maiden". Surely this is an admission that happiness is one of the causes of spiritual development—that the soul grows stronger not only from the exercise of performing duties and overcoming difficulties, but in appreciating the beauty and the joys of earth. And here we touch the Carlylean knot, which

## CARLYLE AND SHAKESPEARE

hindered the unfurling to its full of the banner of his soul—his repudiation of happiness. Twice only, to our remembrance, throughout his letters and journals does he apply that term to himself. After the success of the *French Revolution*, he writes in a letter, "It is long since I have been so idle or so happy". In the *Reminiscences* he describes how he first visited Haddington with Irving, "happy as a lark in May". We are reminded of the two occasions, carefully chronicled by Thackeray, when Major Pendennis sheds tears. Otherwise it is part of his philosophy that man should not seek happiness. "Man's unhappiness comes of his greatness", he says in *Sartor*. "Will the whole Finance Ministers and Upholsterers and Confectioners of modern Europe undertake, in joint stock company, to make one Shoe-black happy?" "Foolish soul! What Act of Legislature was there that *thou* should'st be happy?"

Human nature, says Plato, will find no better helper than love; and Carlyle agrees that, to the young man, heaven is nearest revealed in the young maiden. Why, then, with his feet so surely set upon the first rung of the ladder, did he fail to touch the heaven of contemplation? The answer is in the conditions of his time. As the joy and freedom of the Elizabethan age were trusty allies to the divine mind of Shakespeare, so the sufferings of the poor and the indifference of the money-making classes overshadowed Carlyle with that cloud of anxiety, which, as Newman said, is the enemy to poetry. The social conscience, of which our own age is seeing the development, was awake in the most sensitive minds. Despite the stern laws of political economy, despite such a saying as Walter Bagehot's, that "it is impossible to respect anyone who believes in the brotherhood of man", there is something in the contrast between luxury and poverty to which no conscientious person can reconcile himself, and there are moments when we know in our hearts that we are our brother's keeper. Listen to Carlyle's description in *Past and Present* of the crowded



## CARLYLE AND SHAKESPEARE

work-houses : " Twelve hundred thousand workers in England alone ; their cunning right hand lamed, lying idle in their sorrowful bosom ; their hopes, outlooks, share of this fair world, shut in by narrow walls ". And again : " A mother and a father are arraigned and found guilty of poisoning three of their children, to defraud a ' burial society ' of some £3 8s. 0d. due on the death of each child : they are arraigned, found guilty ; and the official authorities, it is whispered, hint that perhaps the case is not solitary, that perhaps you had better not probe farther into that department of things ". He concludes : " The stern Hebrew imagination could conceive no blacker gulf of wretchedness ".

Now it is obvious we wish such a state of things reversed, we do not wish it to continue—and therefore it is not a fit subject for art. In art we acquiesce in the most terrible things because all is reconciled in beauty. We repudiate Tate's revised version of *King Lear* where the King is restored to his throne and Cordelia marries Edgar. At the close of *Othello* we " look on the tragic loading of this bed ", but do not wish it otherwise. We would not unchain Prometheus from his rock, or rescue Agamemnon from the axe of Clytemnestra or Hector from the spear of Achilles : but a contrary emotion is roused in us as we read Carlyle's political writings.

Shakespeare has also touched the social problem, in the speech of Lear when his unkind daughters shut the door upon him, and he seeks shelter from the storm in a hovel :

" Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,  
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,  
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,  
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you  
From seasons such as these ? O ! I have ta'en  
Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp ;  
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,  
That thou may'st shake the superflux to them,  
And show the heavens more just."

Here again our emotion is the opposite of that which Carlyle awakes, because in art, as in religion, there is



## CARLYLE AND SHAKESPEARE

something that transcends. When our Lord bade the young man give all his possessions to the poor, it was less for the sake of the poor than for himself,—because He knew that the upper reaches of the spirit are closed to those who are troubled about material things. No religion can exist on morality alone, without a motive of other-worldliness ; and no art can fulfil itself with mere human emotion. Mr. F. R. Barry<sup>1</sup> has recently reminded us that “the burden of the Gospels is not how we ought to behave but to portray for us our Lord’s disclosure of the meaning of goodness itself. . . .” “The concern of Jesus”, he says, “was not with conduct at all. . . . His whole life moves in the sphere of the Supernatural. . . .” “The whole story moves in an atmosphere of wonder. . . .” The deepest religious emotion is awe, the deepest æsthetic emotion is beauty. The artist is haunted by an ideal of beauty whose face he can only partially unveil, but a glimpse of which, communicated, can draw from his readers tears as heartfelt as from the most poignant human suffering. Mr. Mackail says truly, writing of Pindar, that some of the greatest poets are without tears and laughter, without love and pity. Nature had formed Carlyle to be the finest artist, but in his sorrow for mankind, he made the great refusal of beauty and happiness.

But it is an old story that nature will not be thrown without a struggle, and it remains to select instances of this life-long struggle between the artist and reformer, and note the scars left upon his work and himself. The early portraits of Burns, Goethe, Dr. Johnson, show Carlyle at his best, in his gathering strength. Allusion has already been made to the episode of Blumine in *Sartor*. There are surely few more impressive passages in historical writing than the death of Louis XV, at the outset of the *French Revolution*, although it has recently been disparaged by Lytton Strachey. “Surely”, he says, “poor Louis XV might be allowed to die without

<sup>1</sup> *The Relevance of Christianity* (Nisbet, 1931).

## CARLYLE AND SHAKESPEARE

a sermon from Chelsea. But no ! The opportunity must not be missed ; the preacher draws a long breath, and expatiates with elaborate emphasis upon all that is most obvious about mortality, crowns, and the futility of self-indulgence ". To our mind there is but one false note struck, one cloud on the sky of the universal. It is where Carlyle utters a deliberate judgment,—when he turns from what he calls "the horrors of a sinner's deathbed ". In *Past and Present* the shades of the prison house have closed, but they dispart with wonderful effect to show the human and lovable Abbot Samson. They are at their deepest in *Latter Day Pamphlets*. He calls Ignatius Loyola "a detestable Human Pig and disgrace to the family of man ". The writers we have named cannot parallel him for abusiveness.

But the *French Revolution* is Carlyle's central book, and in it we see the struggle between temperament and intellect finally decided in favour of the latter. Yet the struggle is severe while it lasts, and the issue does hang in the balance. He came out to curse the Aristocracy, but, like Balaam, there were times when that curse became a blessing. He cannot conceal his love and pity for "feudal Marie Antoinette", his contempt for Robespierre, his repulsion for Marat. His horror at the mob almost adds a new emotion to literature. He admires the young Napoleon who has the courage to deliver the whiffs of grape shot which finally sweep Rascality from the streets. But in summing up losses and gains, intellect takes command, and thenceforth he follows the road which leads to *Latter Day Pamphlets*. From this road he was eventually deflected by an illusion—but one that had the happy result of uniting his intellect and imagination. It was the story of Frederick the Great—the rise of modern Prussia.

It is a weakness of the poet and idealist that he cannot see what is immediately before his eyes. Prussia was separated from Carlyle by race, time, and distance. The chaos that had overtaken English affairs, including the

## CARLYLE AND SHAKESPEARE

Augean stable of Downing Street, it seemed to him, was due to disobeying the laws of God. If Prussia, by her organisation, had achieved Cosmos, it must be because her people had walked in the ways of God. He did not see that he was approving the most gigantic scheme of materialism that has ever been imposed upon the world. Frederick-William, father of Frederick the Great, was the creator of modern Prussia : the first to apply business methods to politics. Carlyle has never drawn a more vivid portrait than this king—whom he admits was half mad—with his nasal voice, his wooden furniture to prevent dust, his scorn of the fine arts, his terror of invasion, his care for the army, the work and discipline to which he subjected the whole nation, his rigorous economies, his tyranny over his family, his essential sensitiveness. And he makes plain that the compelling force of his actions in the outer world was fear, the cruellest of human passions. His recruiting methods cast a shadow of anxiety over every household in his kingdom. There is a Shakespearian disinterestedness about this portrait,—and also a feeling of wonder that such a being has existed. It is seldom that he utters a judgment—once or twice he refers to him as the “terrible king”, the “terrible father”—and the effect is quite other than when he calls Louis XV a sinner. The temporal has become so strong that it overpowers the universal. What Carlyle did not see was the bog of materialism where his hero was infixed. Man’s nature is subdued to what it works in, and the result of well-drilled army, full treasury, money saved yearly and deposited in barrels in the palace vaults, elimination of waste, and many other things, was spiritual defeat. So intense was Frederick-William’s belief in the reality of life that he could hardly believe in death. His wife’s illness, his uncle’s death, came with a shock of surprise ; and his own approaching end, when we see him, in Carlyle’s phrase, “labouring in the mortal quicksands”, is one of the great things of literature.

## CARLYLE AND SHAKESPEARE

If this portrait has a Shakespearian quality it is because the real and ideal are one. Frederick-William was concerned with material things ; it seemed to Carlyle that he was using them to fulfil the will of God ; therefore he has sublimated them, he has bathed them in the light of heaven. That he was abetting the gospel of force—that Frederick-William gained the world but lost his soul—and that Prussia eventually was to lose both the world and her soul—all this was an aftermath of which he did not dream. But for the present we will ask whether he was right in making the great refusal—whether the gain from his philanthropic labours outweighed the loss of his artistic genius half realised : never forgetting that the reason he chose to guide his followers across the moral desert by the pillar of cloud rather than the pillar of fire was the noblest of all. We are ourselves inclined to think that had his whole life been an extension of the Craigenputtock period, something greater might have happened in his mind than in his care-worn London life : could he have succeeded in maintaining inner Silence. If we look at the best in his life and works—his admiration for heroic men and beautiful women,—his care for the refinements of life,—for the fair scenes of nature,—his love of life, however disguised, saddened by the thought of the inevitability of death,—his sensitiveness towards simple domestic scenes,—his feeling for the past, and power to reconstruct historical figures and pageants,—then we do not doubt that the spirit, brooding with such thoughts raised to an ideal level, would have made the abyss pregnant with a fairer world. Instead, many of his thoughts declined to earth like fallen angels, and assumed the forms of anger and opinion. Carlyle's works might have risen to us, over the verge of the nineteenth century, like a Greek temple—a pure form of beauty. We see rather a Roman Colosseum—the witness of gladiatorial combat and Christian martyrdom.

*Shakespearian Criticism*





## SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM<sup>1</sup>

CRITICISM, like all literature, attempts to reach reality by means of earthly beauty. At the outset of our survey, therefore, we will recall the following apposite remark by Prof. A. E. Taylor : " When do any of us reach the stage at which he has learned *all* that Dante or Shakespeare can tell him about human nature ? " <sup>2</sup> It follows that most seventeenth and eighteenth-century criticism of Shakespeare is beside the mark. Criticism then consisted not in exploring a mystery, but in judging according to the rules laid down by Aristotle—such as the unities—and in praising or blaming an author as he observed them or not. Some of the best things said about Shakespeare in these times were occasional rather than formal ; they escaped from the critic as a simple lover of poetry rather than in his critical office ; or they were enumerated as general principles subsequently qualified when a work was considered in detail. Of the latter kind are Ben Jonson's and Dryden's remarks : Ben Jonson's, that Shakespeare cannot be praised too much, that he is the " soul of the age ", equal to Aeschylus, " not of an age but for all time " ; Dryden's, " that of all modern and perhaps ancient poets he had the largest and most comprehensive soul " and " had often written better than any poet in any language ". Nahum Tate (1680) likewise emitted an early flash of light on the subject of Lear's real and Edgar's pretended madness,

<sup>1</sup> A paper read before the Elizabethan Literary Society.

<sup>2</sup> *Faith of a Moralist*, Vol. II, p. 92.

## SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM

—in which he finds so much of extravagant nature as only Shakespeare's creating fancy could have produced.

During the eighteenth century the same principle ruled of judgment rather than interpretation—with two notable exceptions. Peter Whalley (1748) anticipated modern thought with the discovery that Shakespeare had creative imagination : and it is the buisness of art to heighten nature. Maurice Morgann (1777) wrote that there is a sense beyond the understanding—that the understanding is aware only of actions, but this sense determines of actions from certain first principles of character beyond the understanding. True poetry is magic not nature—an effect from causes hidden or unknown. He is thus aware that imagination is the basis of art, not an external ornament.

Otherwise the roll of eighteenth-century critics give out intermittent sparks but no steady light. Shakespeare was a romantic, and it needs a romantic mind to interpret his genius. We may no longer believe that the eighteenth century was an age of prose in the worser sense, but it was undoubtedly a social age, when men began to prefer the town to the country, and to meet regularly in clubs and coffee houses, and be intensely interested in the play of human passion and its relation to the social framework, and in manners—rather than elemental characters and cosmic forces. Hence the critics praise Shakespeare for his "truth to nature", as they call it—what we should now call realism—by which they mean the skill with which he counterfeits passion on the stage. The best things are said incidentally—such as Rowe's remark (1709) that he excels when he gives loose rein to his imagination and makes us believe against reason ; or Addison's, that if such beings as his witches and fairies existed, so would they speak and act. Dennis (1711) is divided between the impression left by Shakespeare's poetry and the scandal of breaking the rules. Gildon (1714) admits that his most irregular plays can produce such pleasure that the reader forgets their faults ; but



## SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM

he lays down the safe maxim that poetry should copy nature truly and observe what is probable. Pope (1725) is not always happy in his textual criticism, but he admits in his Preface that no author, not even Homer, more deserved the name of original. Theobald (1733) does discard the apologetic note when he declares genius to be a law to itself. Thomas Edwards (1748) adds something of his own experience, and thus strikes a modern note, by discovering implied tenderness in the excess of Lear's ravings. As late as 1759 Hugh Blair decided that hardly a play can be read with entire pleasure from end to end. Dr. Johnson (1765) finds in him a faithful representation of nature, but no moral purpose. His tragedy, due to skill, is less great than his comedy due to instinct. We suspect that behind Dr. Johnson's moral bulwark there lurked considerable appreciation of Shakespeare's poetry. With Mrs. Montagu (1769) criticism takes a turn for the better. She no longer finds it needful to defend Shakespeare against the charge of want of art. She has a sense of mystery, and also of romance in her account of popular superstitions. The torch is handed on to Kenrick (1774) who adds some recognition of the complexity of Shakespeare's art—the organic union of plot and morals. Henry Mackenzie (1780) admits irregularity, but, judging by the total impression, is aware of greater and more complex art. He discovers the charm of Hamlet's character; and Thomas Robertson (1788) says of Hamlet that for the first time we see a man of genius on the stage. Bishop Percy (1793) would have criticism put aside preconceived ideas and examine a work by the rule which the author set himself.<sup>1</sup> In the same spirit as Whalley, William Richardson (1798) finds a power to conceive greater excellence than exists

<sup>1</sup> Carlyle is usually credited with this discovery. In his essay on Goethe (1828) he says "we must make plain to ourselves what the poet's aim really was . . . and how far he has fulfilled it. Secondly, we must have decided how far this aim accorded—not with us and our individual crotchets . . . but with human nature . . . and the universal principles of poetic beauty . . ."

## SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM

in the outer world. In these selected remarks we see steady progress from the incidental and apologetic. There is the beginning of recognition that Shakespeare's mind was something greater than had hitherto appeared in literature, and that the art needed to express it was complex rather than irregular. The critics, as if recovering their sight, see darkly men like trees walking. They have become aware of the magic circle in which Shakespeare stood—that Coleridge was now to enter.

Coleridge recognises the imagination as a central not an attendant power, without which art can no more thrive than this earth without the heat of the sun. His mind has at least entered the same circles of thought as Shakespeare's—even if it cannot long stay there—for he communicates experience rather than judgments. If it is possible to convey his teaching in a sentence it is this : that Shakespeare had superlative power to meditate, therefore to universalise himself, therefore to look down on the world almost like a god, seeing through every character, and estimating, from the transcendental standpoint, the shocks of fortune to which such characters are exposed. The "single energy modifying each component part", which he declares to be Shakespeare's particular excellence, animates Coleridge's criticism in its details, and produces such a profound and subtle remark as this on Macbeth's ambition : that to will a temporal end for itself is to will the means. His two worthy critical contemporaries were Lamb and Hazlitt. They amplify and extend his work, pointing to the earthly reactions rather than the transcendental cause. Hazlitt's poignant experience of life inspires him to say that the passion of Romeo and Juliet was founded on pleasures they had not experienced ; and that only on Lear's character could such a story be truly built.

We will now note among the critics who follow Coleridge instances of the recognition of this "single energy". It is the surest method of interpreting Shakespeare, and it is effective according as it corresponds with the critic's

## SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM

inner experience. The greatest names of the first half of the nineteenth century are De Quincey, Hartley Coleridge, Carlyle, Emerson, Charles Knight, and Walter Bagehot. De Quincey writes that Shakespeare has extended the domains of human consciousness ; and in *Macbeth* three old women produce the same effect as the Eumenides of Aeschylus. Hartley Coleridge's best remark is that the Ghost unsettled Hamlet's original grounds of certainty and established no new ones : therefore it is not inconsistent that, having seen the Ghost, he should still doubt of a hereafter. Carlyle calls Shakespeare's faculty " superiority of intellect, which includes all, for faculties are not distinct, but man's spiritual nature, including his morality, is one and indivisible ". Knight discovers a finer unity in Shakespeare, due to his imagination " that lifts his deep philosophy into the highest poetry ". Emerson declares that " his omnipresent humanity co-ordinated all his faculties " ; and Bagehot, contrasting his characters with Goethe's purely literary studies, notes his " patient sympathy and kindly fellow-feeling for the humble ". To these we add the opinions of Ray and Bucknill on Shakespeare's treatment of mental disease. Both agree that in Hamlet, Lear, Ophelia, and others, he anticipated the discoveries of science.

It is from imperfect understanding of this single energy that errors arise in Shakespearian criticism. The greater critics unconsciously or half consciously realise that they can never rise above his mind and explain him as a whole, and they are content to explain that part of him which relates to something permanent in their own mental life. The lesser critics of this half-century are not afraid to judge and classify and make confident statements about his life and himself. We get the famous sentence of Hallam that " there was a period when Shakespeare was ill at ease—when he conceived the censurer of mankind " ; and Verplanck agrees that there was a personal cause for his tragic period. By Armitage Brown

## SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM

he is called "naturally pious"; and by H. N. Hudson "the greatest poet because the greatest Christian". The only personal statement that we are at all inclined to accept is that of Emerson. Coming from the open soul of a man of genius, it carries conviction which is lacking to carefully constructed theories. He calls to witness Shakespeare's "delight in troops of friends, in large hospitality, in cheerful giving"; and concludes that "he is not the least but the best-known person in modern history".

The critics of the 1860's are inclined to build a moral wall round Shakespeare. They esteem him as the greatest poet because the best man and most practical Christian. Such is the teaching of Cowden Clarke, Charles Wordsworth, Heraud, Gerald Massey, Henry Giles. Only Masson conveys the sense of mystery when he defines Shakespeare's "deepest — metaphysical — mood, concerned with death, change, mortality . . . the last thoughts that Humanity can think about itself".

In the 70's two notable critics arose—Pater and Dowden. Pater deduces the single energy from the principle that beauty is truth. Of *Measure for Measure* he says, "Poetry does not always expound morality, but true justice depends on those finer appreciations which poetry cultivates in us the power of making". Dowden is less independent of his age, and therefore moral-haunted, but he feels the mystery of Shakespeare's mind, though he notes almost with surprise that he transcends social morality. That the moral world is independent of the sensible, that there are forces of good and evil independent of the individual's will, that man's desires are infinite and this world finite,—are some of his conclusions. Romeo would love infinitely and there he lies dead. His sense of mystery rather deserts him when he divides Shakespeare's life into four definite periods.

Swinburne's first book (1880) shows the strongly marked limitations of his own somewhat wrathful personality. His eloquence is alloyed with anger against



## SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM

those "criticasters" who think differently from himself or are likely to do so in the future. He argues that Shakespeare, who is above all a poet, should be studied in his verse. His power is to unite the primitive and elemental nature of a poet with wide and deep learning—including knowledge of the Greek dramatists. This enables him to draw his breath easily in the upper atmosphere of the human soul. He says that *King Lear*, the most terrible work of human genius, reveals nature as unnatural. In this decade Stopford Brooke and Arthur Symonds first appear; and a fine critic, O. T. Perkins, describes Shakespeare's fairies as "the shadows dwelling in the border-land between night and day, ruling over the dream-sleep of men". Tributes continue to be paid to his moral and philosophical power and delineation of character, but we withhold all such as are not directly æsthetic, or, by throwing light on the man himself, are indirectly æsthetic.

Of the latter we get some important instances in the early nineties. Edward Caird, a great philosopher, instructed in German metaphysics, says that Shakespeare was no agnostic in the deeper sense. To Sidney Lee "there is no tangible evidence that Shakespeare's tragic period had a personal cause". And again, "We can deduce from his plays a broad practical philosophy, alive with active moral sense, but no self-evident revelation of personal experience of emotion or passion". His book is an ideal statement of the agnostic point of view; it makes us feel the mystery through hesitation to offer a solution. We might place beside it the following sentence by Mr. J. M. Robertson: "Like no other fellow-dramatist, he left London when he might have enjoyed it at leisure, and this is one of our main clues to his innermost character". Dr. Boas interprets with discriminating modern subtlety the tragic characters especially. Of Macbeth, "the wild poetry of barbarism steeped even his crimes in crimson splendour". Othello to Desdemona "is like a being dropped from another

## SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM

world ". " Their love is based on mutual fascination rather than knowledge." With Antony and Cleopatra " it is not love, because their souls have never mingled ".

The twentieth century opens with Leslie Stephen, one of the most sure-footed critics in the history of letters. There is something final in his judgments because he reconciles the logical and æsthetic. He agrees with Sidney Lee that " Shakespeare's life does not explain his genius " ; and in the negative manner which is the best to apply to Shakespeare, he argues that " as his greatest power was to produce varied characters, he must have been capable of an astonishing variety of moods and sympathies ". His religion included " a profound sense of the mystery of the world and the pettiness of men's lives ". In Bradley's great book there is a depth of meditation that justifies comparison with Coleridge. He is not moral in the narrow sense of the word, but his thoughts have a moral basis. It is evil, he says, " that disturbs the order of the world and produces the convulsion ; therefore this order cannot be friendly to evil or indifferent between evil and good ". Yet he warns us that the order " engenders this evil within itself ". We thus see the effect on the sensible world of that single energy which Coleridge said was Shakespeare's particular power. There are times when the innocent perish with the guilty ; and while the tragic hero need not be " good ", he must be " great enough to reveal the possibilities of human nature ". That we acquiesce in this, and do not wish to return to ordinary poetic justice and sentimental morality, proves the existence of a larger world. One would think that with the agnostic position so well defined there would now be no excuse for positive statements about Shakespeare, yet they abound in the pages of Churton Collins who wrote in the same year.

However the main feature of post-Bradley criticism is a kind of experimental subjectivity. Bradley assumed the transcendental mantle of Coleridge, and pointed out that although the vitality of Shakespeare's heroes had

## SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM

anti-humanist reactions, it was a magnificent portent. His successors in romanticism identify the universal part of themselves with Shakespeare. Like the wise men of the East, they lay their thought-offerings at his shrine, and estimate the greatness of his mind by the mystery that remains—by the stillness of the abyss that receives their whole experience and returns no echo. On the whole it is a specialised subjectivity, as they turn towards Shakespeare the part of the mind which has been universalised by acquired knowledge. It remains to choose instances of the success of this method—and at times to point out where subjectivity fails in becoming merely personal. Love of beauty and of the good life inspire Stopford Brooke to say that Jaques has imagination, “a power too noble to lodge with a cynic”; and in Ariel’s “exquisite refinement of nature” to detect “a kind of conscience”. To Swinburne “Shylock’s appeal for charity would not have been so forcible if spoken by a good Jew”. Sidney Lee shows signs of yielding his extreme agnostic position when he suggests that Shakespeare’s utterances as of a natural philosopher, recurring at intervals—e.g. mercy as the crowning virtue in rulers—may be a key to his private convictions. Lytton Strachey warns us against accepting too confidently Shakespeare’s final period as untroubled and serene, and points to certain coarse and violent episodes in the romances. He speaks much truth, but over-depresses the subjective scale: and so does Walter Raleigh who, in the tragedies, hears “Shakespeare’s voice blaspheming the very foundations of life and society”. But he has some fine universalities—if the phrase may be permitted: viz. “character is not destiny: Othello is not jealous by nature”. “Even Cordelia is invented for a situation, so we cannot argue from character to plot”. Swinburne, in his next book, confirms Raleigh when he says that the unequalled pathos of Desdemona’s speech about the sun drawing Othello’s jealous humours from him consists in the fact that she was right. Arthur Symonds finely

## SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM

praises Shakespeare's verse of his late period : ". . . that last refinement where strength comes disguised and beauty seems a casual stranger. In apparent approach to the form of prose verse finally becomes its most authentic self."

In 1910 appeared an important book on the Roman plays by M. W. MacCallum. He arrives at the emotional basis of each play downwards, through an impartial consideration of the historical superstructure. He makes good use of the latest research to show the historical conditions that affected character—notably with the passion of Antony and Cleopatra, when in a world from which morality has disappeared and the contagion of intemperance has spread from East to West, the individual is a law to himself. The best of Prof. Saintsbury's remarks, in the same year, is about Antony whom he describes as "at once ruined and ennobled by his passion". As a whole, his comments on the characters show vision strengthened not deflected by learning, and he excels in applying the test of verse to the chronology of a play. Replying to Sidney Lee's discovery that the majority of the sonnet phrases were conventional, he says, "The poet's essence is to make the common as if not common".

Mr. Masfield brings to his subject a romantic, semi-mystical imagination, reflecting its beauty on the characters he favours, and condemning too utterly the uncongenial, such as Henry V. Darrell Figgis points out that the drama is concerned with emotion, which is the basis of man's life,—and the transforming power is Shakespeare's verse—since Lear, Hamlet, Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, would not be the same persons in prose. With Herford there is brooding sensitiveness to the atmosphere of characters, when the tumult is over and only the memory remains : e.g. that Portia would have been equal to the task had Bassanio chosen wrong ; and that Goneril and Regan are more terribly real because they have at the outset a certain low justice on their side.



## SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM

Brander Matthews surveys Shakespeare's technique, and decides that in only six or ten of his plays, where the subject particularly attracted him, do all his powers work at their full height. Mr. Mackail puts aside the extravagant claims made for Shakespeare as a philosopher, and finds the secret of his unique greatness in his instinct to conform, to fit into his environment. Sir Arthur Quiller Couch unites the romantic, the common sense, and the historical methods,—and is at his best on Hamlet, which, he says, could not be a popular play were it a psychological enigma. Prof. Croce endeavours to free Shakespeare's poetical creative impulse from the heavy robe of theories with which critics have encumbered it ; and one of his characteristic sayings is that Falstaff has a kind of innocence, the result of the complete liberty of his relation toward all restraint and ethical law.

The final lustrum of our period opens with a treatise by Herford, who uses Shakespeare's bias towards normality in social relations as a means to prove the infinite delicacy of the souls of his women characters : the soul that cannot bear the beloved one to think evil of it. Miss Winstanley inaugurates a new kind of criticism by pointing out historical parallels to the plays, among the most startling being the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth*, and also at the time of the murder of Darnley. Also the comparison with Lear of Coligny, whom the Huguenots called "father" of his country. In his darkest hour, Joan of Navarre visits him, like Cordelia visited Lear, and is received as an angel ; and like Cordelia she brings with her a doctor who made many improvements in the treatment of the insane. But the net result is to transfer interest from Shakespeare to history. Mr. Middleton Murry helps us to realise the transcendental nature of Shakespeare's imagination—whence it chances that the writing on the wall may not be rendered in language familiar to earthly understanding. With him, also, the subjective scale is distinctly depressed, but his flight is a magnificent one. To Prof. Macneile Dixon tragedy

## SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM

bears like witness of the existence of a transcendental world with other values than ours—so that when we see Oedipus or Lear punished beyond measure, we do not make the great betrayal of surrender, but are exhilarated and metaphysically comforted. Mr. Richmond Noble discovers that the two opening songs of Autolycus disclose perfectly the character of the singer. Miss Agnes Mure Mackenzie impresses the vitality of Shakespeare's women when probed by the most modern analytical instruments, and she says, not without truth, that Goneril had the strength of stupidity. The last work on the Sonnets by Prof. T. G. Tucker, declares them to be autobiographical. Mr. Granville Barker wishes to prove that the stage trodden by living men and women, not the vacuum of scholarship, is the true means of reaching Shakespeare's imagination. With Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie, who centres good and evil in man—Macbeth, Hamlet—we close the year 1925.

Meanwhile, parallel with the romantics, two other critical columns have been advancing: those of the historical school, and the "disintegrators". Prof. Stoll represents the first, J. M. Robertson the second. In his first essay, on Shakespeare's Ghosts (1907), with immense learning and range of comparison, Prof. Stoll, while absolving Shakespeare from superstition and bigotry, and admitting him to be the world's greatest man, proves that up to a point he shared in popular beliefs. With profound knowledge of the Elizabethan age, disclaiming modern sentiment, and recalling the true technique of comedy, he denies Shylock to be a pathetic creation, insists that in him as money-lender and Jew, Shakespeare embodied two of the deepest and most widely prevalent social antipathies of 2000 years,—and that to make him pathetic is to pervert the author's emphasis. In the same strain, writing of the criminals, he reminds us that in the Elizabethan drama conscience was an external thing that concerned itself with punishment rather than sorrow for sin: e.g. Macbeth, Gloster, Leontes, Rich-

## SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM

ard III. On the subject of Falstaff, he sets aside the refinements of Morgann, and shows Falstaff as the typical coward of mediæval and Renaissance comedy. Of Shakespeare himself he says, "The man who most prized character seems to have been hardly a character at all". This is the same kind of thought as Mr. Mackail's, a few years before,—“that Shakespeare floated with the stream and was a conformist by instinct”; and it also recalls a point of J. M. Robertson's, “that Shakespeare's power to adapt himself to the circumstances of his age was a kind of personal trait”.

J. M. Robertson published his first book on the subject of “disintegration” in 1905. He attempts to prove that Shakespeare was only part author of the plays collected in the Folio, and to extricate his share. The central test is versification, and he contrasts the beauty and variety of Shakespeare's verse with that of his contemporaries. He brings home the witchcraft of Shakespeare's style that could re-animate the dead matter of Greene and Chapman. For such reasons he decides that Mark Antony's oration was the work of Marlowe, with its monotonous end-stopped verse and hideous metaphor of the “dumb mouths”. He is opposed by Sir Edmund Chambers who says that Shakespeare experimented in rhythm, and that Robertson looks for a Shakespeare always at the top of his achievement. But we think that every great poet has a characteristic style, and it is this which Robertson endeavours to isolate. In rejecting *Arden of Feversham*, which Swinburne accepts, he accuses Swinburne of being “temporarily style-blind and rhythm-deaf”,—and thus creates the same kind of situation as in a play of Bernard Shaw's.

In the same way, if we read Prof. Stoll side by side with a critic like Stopford Brooke, we could imagine a Huxley-Wilberforce debate; and yet it is possible to harmonise the work of the three schools. The historical school, by restoring a right conception of Elizabethan stage conditions and the Elizabethan mind,—and the

## SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM

disintegrators, by purifying the text, clear the ground for the romantics, and leave behind only what is legitimate matter for the romantic imagination to work upon. They play the part of Sancho Panza to Don Quixote, by occasional reminders that windmills are not giants or flocks of sheep marching armies. It is the duty of the romantics to lay their whole experience at the feet of Shakespeare, and, finding how much he transcends, to fall back in adoration like Plato's charioteer of the soul before the vision of absolute beauty.

And now that the procession has passed, and with the echoes of the critics' words still in our ears, we will ask ourselves in Socratic fashion what is criticism, and to what extent do the critics help us to understand Shakespeare? Prof. Stoll, recalling the etymology of the word, insists that a critic is a judge not an impressionist. He says, "A work of art referred only to the critic's personal impressions may mean anything, everything—that is nothing". Also, "Is not a critic a judge, who does not explore his own consciousness, but determines the author's meaning or intention, as if the poem were a will, a contract, or the constitution? The poem is not the critic's own".<sup>1</sup> The last phrase, that the poem is not the critic's own, sounds the most convincing but is the most disputable, and was anticipated by Emerson. On the subject of quotation, Emerson writes, "We are as much informed of a writer's genius by what he selects as by what he originates. We read the quotation with his eyes and find a new and fervent sense. . . ." "Everyone remembers his friends by their favourite poetry or other reading". And in support of Emerson we will add that it is against literary manners to quote a writer's quotations without acknowledgment.

<sup>1</sup> Shortly after completing this essay, I read as follows in *The Times Literary Supplement* (12th Jan., 1933), on the subject of Arnold's definition of poetry as "a criticism of life": "In using the term 'criticism', is it not 'selection', the root notion of *κρίσις*, that he has in mind, rather than that of 'condemnation' or even 'judgment'."



## SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM

There is something unsatisfactory in judgments without impressions, and they are usually delivered by writers of assured reputation to a confiding audience. In this mood Matthew Arnold appraised Shelley's letters from Italy above his poetry : for which he was well scolded by Swinburne. Ruskin's reputation has gone down before the discovery that the genius of the painters whom he commanded the public to admire fell short of his estimation. And Ruskin himself proves that impressions may be turned to any account, when he applies modern sentiment to Homer. Reading how the bodies of Castor and Pollux were reposing in the " life-giving " earth in Lacedaemon, he notes the epithet " life-giving ", and explains that though Homer " has to speak of the earth in sadness, he will not let that sadness affect or change his thought of it ". And for this he in turn was impeached by Arnold on the charge of false criticism. It will help us to remember that Mr. Arthur Symonds detected sentimentality in Lady Nairne's song, *The Land o' the Leal* ; and so far we agree with Prof. Stoll—that it is wrong to introduce irrelevant emotion. But now we will turn to Prof. Saintsbury who says that the business of the critic is " to define feeling ". He writes, " Feel, discover the source of feeling . . . express the discovery so as to communicate the feeling ". In the words, " discover the source of feeling ", we think to find a bridge between Prof. Stoll—that the poem is not the critic's own—and Emerson—that it is possible to express ourselves by selecting or remembering the thoughts of others.

It is an old saying that spiritual things can be only spiritually discerned, and it means that if we would effect contact with the soul of the universe we must cultivate that which corresponds with it in ourselves. Equally true is it that imaginative things can be only imaginatively discerned ; and Prof. Saintsbury again helps us with the remark that " style is the body of literature and imagination the soul ". Imagination is the link between God

## SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM

and man ; it uses the intellect to tell us who are confined in the flesh what is proceeding in heaven ; and the poets are the true prophets. The best books are those where objects of sense are so ordered as to reveal the world of imagination : as the most beautiful human beings are those whose bodies have become the means of expressing their souls. It is the writer's business to receive and the critic's to decipher the heavenly message. The sensible objects in which it is clothed are so many veils that conceal the final reality. At times the vision will be clear, at others fitful—according as the writer fails to convey his experience, or the critic is ill fitted to receive it. In order to create his soul and approach reality, man, while in the flesh, must work in earthly material. He must know joy and sorrow, love, friendship, disappointment, untiring effort, perhaps success and fruition, perhaps failure and loneliness. In the proportion in which the events of his life have stimulated the growth of his soul, will the writer express reality,—and in the same proportion with his own experience will the critic recognise it. As an instance, Leslie Stephen noted that all poetry is trifling compared with Wordsworth's "when we are making our inevitable passages through the Valley of the Shadow of Death". In this sense we will decide—against Prof. Stoll—that the poem *is* the critic's own—and, with Emerson—that we know a writer as much by what he selects as by what he originates ; but we agree that impressions may mean anything, when we find critics guilty of sentimentalism—that is, introducing into their subject irrelevant emotion.

We will therefore define criticism as proportional identification of spiritual experience in the ascent towards reality. The result is sense of companionship, of mitigated loneliness in the difficult places of life's pilgrimage. But criticism is an art, and we are therefore not satisfied with its most elementary form, which is quotation, nor its next stage which is simply abstract expression of praise or blame. Art is concrete, and we demand of the critic

## SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM

proof in imaginative terms that he has seen the vision. Perhaps for this reason there is so much of Shakespeare's mind that escapes us. When Coleridge says that in *Lear* old age itself is a character, he makes an excellent psychological point. Bradley's description of the place of evil in Shakespeare's world is philosophical criticism of the highest kind. It might seem that Swinburne supplied our need when he describes the great tragedies as "the heavenly quadrilateral", or "the four fixed stars which compose our Northern Cross"; but this is pictorial rather than imaginative in the sense that we desire. Or, to leave Shakespeare for the moment, Myers speaks of certain lines in the *Aeneid* that "beat with the very pulses of the heart", and he compares others to "bars of gold". Or Francis Thompson writes thus of Shelley: "He dabbles his fingers in the day-fall. He is gold-dusty with tumbling amidst the stars. The meteors nuzzle their noses in his hand. He gets between the feet of the horses of the sun". But even these are fanciful as well as imaginative, and might be applied to other subjects than their own. There is still lacking that strait relation between author and critic that proclaims them fellow pilgrims of eternity—fellow sharers of the feast of life, or fellow sufferers in its prisons.

For the highest criticism of all we must go to great poets such as Virgil and Milton and some others. Translations of the classics are notoriously unsatisfactory; we can read through a whole version of the *Aeneid* in another language and miss the spirit, but we find it in two lines of Spenser—when we compare the panic roused in the ghosts of the Greek heroes by the appearance of Aeneas in the lower world,

"Ut videre virum fulgentiaque arma per umbras",

with the effect of the knight Guyon in the *Faerie Queene* on the workers at the furnace in the Cave of Mammon:

"But when an earthly wight they present saw  
Glistring in armes and battailous array . . ."

## SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM

In the first idyll of Theocritus we hear Thyrsis speak :  
" Where were ye when Daphnis was languishing, where  
were ye, Nymphs ? By the beautiful dells of Peneus or  
by those of Pindus ? For ye were not by the great stream  
of the river Anapus, nor by the watch-tower of Etna, nor  
by the sacred water of Acis ". And Milton reproduces  
his thought in *Lycidas* :

" Where were ye, Nymphs, when the remorseless deep  
Closed o'er the head of your loved Lycidas ?  
For neither were ye playing on the steep  
Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie,  
Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high,  
Nor yet where Deva spreads her wizard stream . . . "

Here are different names and local associations, but the  
same spirit : the souls of Milton and Theocritus have  
approached reality by the same forms of beauty. Or we  
may watch the experience of three minds—of Homer,  
Virgil, and Milton. Odysseus meets his mother in  
Hades, and Aeneas meets his father in the Elysian Fields,  
and in either case the phantoms dissolve like dreams or  
shadows at each of three attempts to embrace them.  
Milton pictures Satan about to address words of encour-  
agement to the hosts of fallen angels newly risen from  
the burning lake :

" Thrice he assayed, and thrice, in spite of scorn,  
Tears, such as Angels weep, burst forth . . . "

Then there is Homer's line (*Odyssey*, XI, 392) where the  
shade of Agamemnon stretches forth his hands in his  
longing to reach Odysseus : and Virgil's corresponding  
line (*Aeneid*, VI, 314) where the ghosts of the unburied  
dead make the same gesture towards the further bank of  
the Styx :

" Tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore ".

Here, we think, Virgil improves upon the original ; and  
it is instructive for our purpose to note fluctuations in  
beauty. Homer's description of the mustering of the  
Myrmidons in the sixteenth book of the *Iliad* is greater



## SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM

than Milton's description of the mustering of the fallen angels in the first book of *Paradise Lost*; but in one passage Milton surpasses Homer. The shout with which the Myrmidons rush into battle has not the supreme effect of the shout with which the angels salute the unfurling of Satan's banner. It is said that a poet may only borrow in order to improve, yet not only does the less great give equal pleasure because it recalls the original,—but, when we return to the original, we find an added pleasure because its subject has been re-imagined, and is therefore a witness to the identification of spiritual experience—to the communion of souls—in the ascent towards reality. And even where the later has surpassed the earlier, it is still to be called criticism, because it was inspired by the written word. But the needful thing is that the imagination should work,—or the poet become a translator or plagiarist. Milton at times is a translator—when Satan exclaims, "Me miserable!"—or, in his address to the light, when he uses the Latin idiom, "Hear'st thou rather?" instead of "Would'st thou rather be called?" And the Greek poet Moschus, who speaks of nightingales lamenting among the thick leaves, in his elegy on Bion—using the very words of Penelope's nightingale simile (*Odyssey*, XIX, 518) is simply a plagiarist from failure of imagination.

If, therefore, much light has been thrown on the buttresses of the Shakespearian range but little on the peaks, it is because we lack the socialising, imaginative interpretation of critics like Virgil and Milton, which proclaims them brothers in spirit with Homer and each other. The criticism that we have—æsthetic, philosophical, historical, pictorial—is once removed from the final reality. Only the critic who expresses in concrete form his re-imagining of Shakespeare's imaginings can convince us that he has seen the vision. But if we cannot convince others, we can at least, by continuing to record and compare impressions even in abstract or semi-con-

## SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM

crete form, do service in investigation rather than proof, like the Society for Psychical Research,—and work cumulatively for a far-off divine event. There is therefore a future for the romantic critics who bring their whole individual experience to Shakespeare—infininitely varied by age and race and custom. For because we see him absorb mind after mind and still elude generalisation, we may be compared with the mystics of the first stage who have effected contact with something like ourselves but far greater—and we are divinely consoled.

*The Uses of the Classics*



## THE USES OF THE CLASSICS

WHEN Rawdon Crawley, who, as Thackeray tells us, "had that decent and honest reverence for classical learning which all English gentlemen feel", visited his son at school, he tried to look knowing over the Latin Grammar, and advised him with much gravity to "stick to it", because "there's nothing like a good classical education!" His opinion is corroborated in our own day by Mr. J. W. Mackail who maintains there is something which only the classics can give. A certain prelate formerly observed that knowledge of Greek led to positions of emolument and made one feel superior to others. Mr. Mackail inevitably dismisses the first claim,—and of the second he says that it makes us feel consciously superior not to others but to ourselves. M. Julien Benda,<sup>1</sup> who impeaches scholars for letting themselves be drawn into politics away from the ideal and universal, includes their neglect of the study of ancient literature. The defeat of the scholar, he says, begins from the moment he becomes practical. He could not prevent the realist from filling the world with the tumult of hatred and massacre, but he could prevent him making a religion of these things. Thanks to the scholar's labours, the world for 2000 years did evil but honoured good: and through this crevice civilisation entered.

On the other hand there are many who maintain that the pace of modern life is so great that all education

<sup>1</sup> *La Trahison des Clercs* (Paris, Grasset, 1927).



## THE USES OF THE CLASSICS

should be strictly practical ; they would even forbid children to read fairy tales. That these two opposing camps have always existed we know from the historic instance of the old Romans who shook their heads over the artistic trophies which Marcellus brought back from Syracuse, because they encouraged youths to talk about curious trifles instead of attending to their military duties ; also of Cato the Censor who feared the study of Greek would ruin the State. The psychology of the latter closely resembles that of Frederick-William of Prussia, father of Frederick the Great, who declaimed against his son's " Athenian-French " delicacies, which threatened, as he thought, the security of the organised nation and well-drilled army he had laboured all his life to perfect. On one occasion, as we know, armed with a cane, he burst into the room where the son was reading Latin with a tutor. Bismarck is a formidable addition to the anti-classical ranks ; while Cobden openly said that he would give the whole of Thucydides for one copy of *The Times*.

In the last few years Dr. Oswald Spengler<sup>1</sup> has advanced some provocative theories which, like many of his countrymen, he would carry to a logical conclusion, as if life were a syllogism. The above-mentioned critics tell us that we ought not to enjoy the classics, Dr. Spengler says that we cannot. Our love for them, in his opinion, is a venerable prejudice, and we only think that we understand them. The distinction he most emphasises is between Culture and Civilisation : although it had previously been made by Houston Chamberlain and applied to the Phœnicians. Dr. Spengler decides, truly enough, that we live in a civilised, not a cultured, age, and have to reckon with the hard cold facts of a *late* life,—and if we do not face our destiny we are simpletons, charlatans, or pedants. After Syracuse, Athens, and Alexandria, comes Rome ; after Madrid, Paris, and London, come Berlin and New York. Every culture has

<sup>1</sup> *The Decline of the West*.

## THE USES OF THE CLASSICS

arrived at a secret language of world-feeling only to be understood by those whose souls belong to that culture.

Culture has to do with the soul, civilisation with the intellect,—and, according to Dr. Spengler, the grey dawn of civilisation sees the fire of the spirit die down. We are inhabitants of the World-City, traditionless, utterly matter-of-fact, religionless, clever, unfruitful. The time for art and philosophy has passed. Diplomats, inventors, financiers, are the truest philosophers to-day; more intelligence, taste, character, capacity, are to be found in the shareholders' meeting of a limited company, or the technical staff of any first-rate engineering works than in present-day music and painting. . . . And yet we refuse to surrender our souls and our culture at Dr. Spengler's bidding. We will not consent meekly to be the "spiritually dead men of the autumnal cities". As the town-weary person is revived by the "healing touch of earth", so we will find something in the classics to abate another insistent modern malady.

All the foregoing arguments assume an undivided interest in life. But there is something equally important as life—and that is death: from the moment we are born we are condemned to die. Dr. Spengler himself admits that "the higher thought originates as meditation upon death". The modern man is distracted not between fears of hell or hopes of heaven, but annihilation or survival. Death is a lonely thing, and however we may surround ourselves with people and interests, at any moment we may have to undertake the adventure. One thing only can ensure against despair—the cultivation of the soul. We agree with Dr. Spengler that it is our misfortune to live in an age of civilisation not culture, but we do not agree that we are spiritually dead. If our souls fail to make themselves known by joy, they do by pain—the grief of parting, the recoil from nothingness.

We quoted M. Benda's saying, that when the scholar becomes practical he is untrue to himself: and this applies to the education of the soul. Experience of life is not

## THE USES OF THE CLASSICS

education ; it confirms prejudices, drives the mind deeper into the furrow of realism, and makes man once more the centre of a Ptolemaic universe. The seriousness of the prosperous business man is the most depressing thing in the world ; and his argument that you can do nothing without money is unanswerable. The true aim of education is to convince us, like Socrates, that we know nothing. In an outward and "civilised" age like our own, institutional religion yields to mysticism. The gains of the mystic, taken at their lowest, are that man's soul can establish contact with something greater than itself. The way of mysticism is hard, and it is the duty of education, working through the imagination, to help us along this spiritual road.

Imagination informs the written word like a soul ; and true reading is spiritual communion between author and reader. Lady Macbeth, in the sleep-walking scene, exclaims, "Who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him !" and these words re-impress with awe and terror at their hundredth reading, though they might have occurred in a detective novel and would have been dismissed as repulsive. The reason is the amount of imagination that lies behind them. Goethe's Mignon (*Meister*) throbs with life ; but Scott's Fenella (*Peveril*) imagined at second-hand from Goethe's Mignon, hardly lives. Prof. Gilbert Murray instances the beauty of Helen and the driving of Jehu. Homer, he says, nowhere describes Helen, but the world has accepted her beauty because it was intensely imagined. Jehu's driving is mentioned once only yet has passed into a proverb. This precious quality has made enduring an unpretentious little volume like the *Roadmender*. Its "white gate" is no ordinary means of communication between field and highway.

The first thing that strikes about the classics is that they belong to different countries and ages from our own, and are separated from us by time and space. Herein lies their attraction—in the effect of distance upon

## THE USES OF THE CLASSICS

imagination. In life we have a special feeling for the persons we have known from earliest days. An individual once met on the other side of the globe and recognised at home, moves something in our heart ; and so does a fellow-townsmen discovered unexpectedly in a foreign country. The cause of the emotion is the victory over time and space : and the greater the distance and the longer the time, the more powerful is the emotion. Esau must traverse breadths of desert and meet Jacob among strangers before he can put away his wrath and learn the truth of the soul. The companions or subordinates of our daily existence, as years pass by, lose whatever ungracious features they possessed : these things belong to time and therefore to illusion ; it is the soul that comes true in the end. Only now and then there flashes upon us out of the crowd a face once seen but that of a friend for ever : his soul has come true at once without the reconciling lengths of time and space. That day is heaviest when we struggle with time, and lightest when we do not mark its passage. Those of us whose duties keep us in towns may cherish in our hearts a remote country village. Why is it dearer to us now than ten years ago, and dearer in proportion as it is more distant ? Because the rare visits and separating miles are symbols of illusions to be overcome before our souls are in heaven. In literature one method of testing poetry is by its power to annihilate time and space, and thus prove that the soul has been stirred. The true poem, as we repeat it to ourselves, brings back the atmosphere of the time in which we learnt it—the place, the people, the seasons, the events of our lives. Time and space become illusions, the one reality is the soul which can cross and recross the gulf at its pleasure.

Carlyle and others have said that the past looks beautiful because it is free from the "fear" that haunts us in the present. But the true distinction is between memory and imagination : as Plato in the *Phaedrus* (258, D) distinguished between one who writes as a poet



## THE USES OF THE CLASSICS

(ποιητής) or a private person (ιδιώτης). Memory is more or less mechanical ; it recalls the past as it was ; it is the individual's private faculty, and often brings as much distress as satisfaction. Only when a past event separates itself from our personal being and becomes an island in the universal sea, to be known by all, has it been imagined. Our soul meets and knows itself as in a mirror ; and what it thought vast perspectives of space and time were reflections of reflections in the mirror, and illusions of infinity. We use the imagined past to recognise our own souls, we use literature to recognise the souls of our brothers.

Not banished fear but the use of imagination makes the past look beautiful, because imagination is a faculty of the soul and can light such a candle as to dispel the thickest tragic gloom. It is often said that we take pleasure in tragic scenes, and the reasons have been variously guessed from the "catharsis" of Aristotle, through later theories of "imitation of nature" or "illusion of reality" to the speculations of modern writers such as Prof. Macneile Dixon who, noticing the strange effect that suffering promotes delight, concludes that tragedy is the art of metaphysical comfort, and leads to discoveries within ourselves and guesses regarding the larger nature which has given birth to us. There is nothing joyful in Cassandra's outcry as she enters the House of Atreus and sees with her mind's eye the floor running with blood,—or in Lear's curse on Goneril,—yet as we read these passages our dominating emotion is joy : because the souls of Aeschylus and Shakespeare are speaking to our own across the airway of imagination. When we use our imagination we are conscious of our souls, and when conscious of our souls we are conscious of our immortality, and therefore we rejoice. If this is true of indirect communication, it is truer still when soul meets soul to discourse of its own experience.

The ultimate pleasure of literature is autobiographical—the meeting of soul with soul. Great critics—such



## THE USES OF THE CLASSICS

as Leslie Stephen—have called autobiography the most fascinating branch of literature ; and Bagehot, writing of Milton, went a step further when he described “magnanimous autobiography” as one of the rarest of literary charms. Creation, as Ruskin said, is not to manufacture but to put life into a thing : and indeed we say that a verse or a sentence lives when we catch the accents of the writer’s voice. But here again we must discriminate in favour of Bagehot : it does not suffice to hear a voice,—but the voice must have a special tone. We hear Milton’s voice in the *Tetrachordon* sonnet, but we are ashamed for the author of *Paradise Lost* when we read lines like these :

“Cries the stall-reader, ‘Bless us ! what a word on  
A title-page is this !’ ; and some in file  
Stand spelling false, while one might walk to Mile-  
End Green”.

Lady Burton thus begins the life of her husband, Sir Richard Burton : “In speaking of my husband, I shall not call him ‘Sir Richard’ or ‘Burton’, as many wives would ; nor yet by the pet name I used for him at home, which for some reason which I cannot explain was ‘Jemmy’, nor yet what he was generally called at home, and what his friends called him, ‘Dick’, but I will call him Richard in speaking of him, and ‘I’ where he speaks on his own account, as he does in his private journals”. We certainly hear a living voice, but we do not care to hear it. It moves us to reply, like Queen Victoria to a “funny” story, “We are not amused”. It reminds us how the hero of *Rob Roy* recognised Andrew Fairservice in a crowd by his “conceited” voice. The imperfect imagination and predominance of earth in these two passages remove them far from Helen’s beauty, Jehu’s driving, and the “white gate”. For our present purpose we will follow the “magnanimous” Bagehot.

When Benedict asks Margaret to contrive an interview for him with Beatrice, she replies,

“Will you then write me a sonnet in praise of my beauty ?”

## THE USES OF THE CLASSICS

When Hermione hears that Perdita is found, she exclaims,

“ You gods, look down,  
And from your sacred vials pour your graces  
Upon my daughter's head ! ”

When Antony is told of Cleopatra's death, he cries to his attendant,

“ Unarm, Eros ; the long day's task is done,  
And we must sleep ”.

Margaret is so fulfilled with the joy of youth and life that she loves the whole world and confides her happiness to the first comer. Hermione's soul is suddenly uplifted as she realises that this world counts for something and her years of sorrow have not been in vain. Antony had been a gross and earthly lover, but the lusts of the flesh had dulled not destroyed his soul. It now bursts forth with sunset splendour and casts level beams that transfigure the darkest corners of the past. One moment of true spiritual life makes as nothing his whole troubled mortal career. All these speakers have found the joys of heaven upon earth.

We will match these quotations with three from the classics, and if they surpass even Shakespeare in charm it is because the voice comes to us from a greater distance, and greater lengths of time and space are overcome. We read in Horace (*Odes*, II, 6) :

“ Ver ubi longum, tepidasque praebet  
Jupiter brumas ”.

We read in Virgil (*Aeneid*, VI, 664) :

“ Quique sui memores aliquos fecere merendo ”.

We read in Catullus (III) :

“ Qui nunc it per iter tenebricosum  
Illuc, unde negant redire quemquam ”.

Horace's ideal world is not very far from the real which he knows so well ; his idealisation consists in making

## THE USES OF THE CLASSICS

objective the happiness of which he has so much experience ; and because his mood is contentment, not regret, there is the suggestion of immortality. With Virgil the happiness is once removed from himself but no less real. It is the antithesis of Falstaff's soliloquy on honour. Virgil thinks that man well compensated for the shocks of life, for wounds and death, if his memory lives on in the hearts of others ; and it touches him nearly because, by dwelling apart and consecrating himself to beauty, he has gained the power to celebrate these heroes in immortal verse and meet them in the spirit as an equal. The third instance may seem to contradict ; indeed on the word "tenebricosum" we hear the poet's voice falter and convey to us the whole depth of pagan grief untouched by Christian hope. But as the echoes die away we are conscious of a change : he has found happiness in expressing rhythmically his sorrow ; he is self-converted by his own art ; he has created and loved a Pygmalion-image and forgotten the rest of the world. It is either the dawn or the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow. These speakers likewise have found the joys of heaven upon earth

If imagination can convert tragic gloom into joy, how much deeper is that joy when there is no gauntlet to be run of seeming horrors, but the soul possesses itself ! It is frequently said that a poet writes to express his soul ; the higher truth is that he writes to find it : and those who re-imagine their happy past have the same object. If these six quotations have anything in common, and a common link with life, it is that the happiness which they suggest is like re-imagined happiness, and therefore beyond time, not based on hope or anticipation as is so much earthly happiness. And because such happiness is only complete when shared by others, it transcends self, and is like the comfort which the mystic feels when his soul is absorbed into something greater than himself. And if the classics exceed in charm, as do imaginings of childhood those of later life, it is because the victory over time is greater. By stimulating our imaginations still

## THE USES OF THE CLASSICS

further than the works of our own writers, across wider gulfs of space and time, they make us doubly conscious that our souls are active and our immortality secure.

We will therefore assume that we do understand something of the classics, in spite of Dr. Spengler's charges of "simpleton, charlatan, or pedant". We decline to be called "the spiritually dead men of the autumnal cities". We accept his culture-civilisation theory; but is it impossible for a new culture to spring out of our present civilisation? Paraguay, under Francia, produced two harvests in a year; and when it is realised that materialism leads nowhere, that possession of unlimited money, acquaintance with notorious people, and facilities to scour over the surface of the earth, do not bring happiness,—then the old conception will revive, that he who stays at home and cultivates his soul leads the fullest life. Nor will the worst method of cultivation be to listen for the voice that comes from a distance. Meanwhile those of us who reserve a daily half-hour for the study of Greek and Latin writers will assume it is our proud destiny to keep the old culture alive. We have already disagreed with Dr. Spengler; we will also disagree with Cato the Censor, Frederick-William, and Bismarck,—and range ourselves with Mr. Mackail, M. Benda, and Rawdon Crawley,—and we will "stick to the classics".

*Shakespeare's Songs*





## SHAKESPEARE'S SONGS

THE object of art is to communicate emotion. Music is the most perfect of the arts because it communicates the purest emotion, where matter and form are closest united, where the emotion is itself alone and can least be translated into intellectual language. The sister arts approach or recede from perfection in so far as they are like music. In the whole range of art, outside music, no emotion comes to us in so pure a form as that from Shakespeare's songs.

The word "emotion" has become dulled by repetition, and it is therefore well to remember that it means "movement of the soul". When a work of art moves us it makes the soul stir in its material surroundings and become active. When conscious of our souls we are filled with joy, because for the moment we are like immortal beings; and for this reason the most tragic passages of the great masters delight and do not horrify because they reach and awaken the soul. One of the soundest arguments in favour of a Personal God is that intellect and moral emotion cannot have been given us by a power that had none of its own. In the same way we argue that emotion in our souls can only be roused by like emotion in another soul: and the ultimate pleasure of literature, and its point of contact with life, is therefore the communion of souls.

In pursuing this enquiry into the centre of Shakespeare, we will first pause at the outer barriers—Who and what is Shakespeare? Of late years a band of

## SHAKESPEARE'S SONGS

students, headed by Mr. J. M. Robertson, has sprung up, who question Shakespeare's entire authorship of the Folio. They admit his revising hand but not his creating hand in many of the plays collected under his name. The total effect of Mr. Robertson's work is to increase our admiration for Shakespeare ; and it will help us to find the road to the core of Shakespeare's art, namely his songs, if we begin by dissecting our impressions from certain passages in the plays where we think his hand is absent.

At the close of *Richard II* when Bolingbroke hears that Mowbray is dead he exclaims, " Sweet peace conduct his sweet soul to the bosom of good old Abraham ! " and we know this is not Shakespeare. Now hearken to Bolingbroke, become Henry IV, expressing his thoughts likewise in Scriptural language :

" Forthwith a power of English shall we levy  
To chase these pagans in those holy fields  
Over whose acres walked those blessèd feet  
Which fourteen hundred years ago were nailed  
For our advantage on the bitter cross ".

The first passage is spoken with the lips only ; in the second we feel the bars of language yielding to the pressure of a living soul. We turn to the most famous of all the non-Shakespearian passages in the plays—Mark Antony's oration—and at its very climax and crescendo we read :

" For when the noble Cæsar saw him stab,  
Ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms,  
Quite vanquished him : then burst his mighty heart——"

Like Balaclava, this is magnificent but it is not war. It is rhetoric of the highest order, but not poetry, not Shakespeare. Even when further on Antony speaks of himself,

" I am no orator, as Brutus is ;  
But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man,  
That love my friend——"

he tells us nothing about his inner self. That power is

## SHAKESPEARE'S SONGS

absent which all Shakespeare's characters possess of revealing their souls with every word they utter. Only less famous is Clarence's dream (*Richard III*), and we notice the same omission in lines like these :

“—— then came wandering by  
A shadow like an angel, with bright hair  
Dabbled in blood ; and he shrieked out aloud,  
' Clarence is come ; false, fleeting, perjured Clarence,  
That stabbed me in the field by Tewksbury ;  
Seize on him ! Furies, take him unto torment ' ”

But although throughout the play Marlowe predominates over Shakespeare, now and then we do catch Shakespeare's voice—for instance, in these lines spoken by Hastings :

“ My lord, I hold my life as dear as yours ;  
And never in my days, I do protest,  
Was it so precious to me as 'tis now ”.

This is the very “ accent and vibration ” of Shakespeare's voice, though in an early stage ; but we will pass over the middle stages and listen to the mature Shakespeare. The faithful steward in *Timon* thus concludes his lament for the lavish expenditure in his master's house :

“ I have retired me to a wasteful cock,  
And set mine eyes at flow ”.

Lear's speech of self-reproach, when he enters the hovel, culminates in these words :

“ Take physic, pomp ;  
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,  
That thou may'st shake the superflux to them,  
And show the heavens more just ”.

In these we feel the pressure of a living soul behind the bars of language ; and if the metaphor suggests that the effect of language is that of a prison-house, we ask whether it is possible to file these bars still slenderer, so that the reflection of a soul, almost unshadowed by earthly restraints, is cast upon the outer world. The answer is, Yes : in Shakespeare's songs, which of all

## SHAKESPEARE'S SONGS

literary work approach nearest to the perfect art of music.

In literature attempts have failed to separate sense from sound : the emotion of the airiest lyric is supported by a slender logical frame-work. Compared to prose this frame-work may be like a gossamer fabric or spider's web to the steel and concrete of an American sky-scraper, —but none the less it exists. Hamlet's most famous soliloquy is soundly reasoned throughout to its culminating point in the lines,

“ But that the dread of something after death,  
The undiscovered country from whose bourn  
No traveller returns, puzzles the will——”

The logical or intellectual faculty, by which man orders his earthly life, cannot be wholly omitted in poetry ; but as the object of poetry is to express the soul, the greatness of a poet may be measured by his power to attenuate his intellectual supports till they become well nigh invisible : as Shakespeare does in his songs.

To receive the beauty of Hamlet's soliloquies, the reader's mind must be carefully prepared ; but the unique power of the songs is to achieve an instant effect of beauty without previous preparation. Consider the following lines dropped suddenly into the dialogue of the *Merry Wives* :

“ To shallow rivers, to whose falls  
Melodious birds sing madrigals ”.

Attempts have been made with very partial success, by English and German critics, to assign a dramatic value to the songs ; but as we listen to this heavenly strain we forget the character of Sir Hugh Evans and the action of the play and think only of Shakespeare's soul. Consider the song of Balthazar in *Much Ado* :

“ Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,  
Men were deceivers ever,  
One foot in sea, and one on shore,  
To one thing constant never.



## SHAKESPEARE'S SONGS

" Sing no more ditties, sing no mo,  
Of dumps so dull and heavy ;  
The fraud of men was ever so,  
Since summer first was leavy."

We will note in passing that the hearer's mind is roused to greatest joy by those passages which threaten to dissolve utterly the logical framework, such as the third line which for a moment suggests an entire departure from the subject of the first two ; and also by the mention in the second stanza of a word like " dumps ", usually considered prosaic, but carried by the strength of Shakespeare's wing into the highest heaven of poetry. As a further instance of this divine inconsequence we will turn to the last stanza of the Clown's song at the conclusion of *Twelfth Night* :

" A great while ago the world begun ;  
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain ;  
But that's all one, our play is done,  
And we'll strive to please you every day ".

Or take the song in *Love's Labour's Lost*, containing such expressions as, " While greasy Joan doth keel the pot ", or, " Marian's nose looks red and raw ",—only noting, as we pass on, that they do not fall below the beauty-line.

And now, as a means of getting at the essential charm of Shakespeare, we will compare the song of Sabrina in Milton's *Comus* :

" By the rushy-fringed bank,  
Where grows the willow and the osier dank,  
My sliding chariot stays,  
Thick set with agate, and the azurn sheen  
Of turkis blue, and emerald green,  
That in the channel strays ;  
Whilst from off the waters fleet  
Thus I set my printless feet  
O'er the cowslip's velvet head,  
That bends not as I tread ".

Here there is certainly not the divine inconsequence of Shakespeare, but deliberate choice, careful selection, almost painful search for beautiful things, and rejection

## SHAKESPEARE'S SONGS

of many in the process, by one who secludes himself from the world and turns to the literature of the past in order to create beauty, knowing well that much in the world about him is not beautiful.

Or we will compare the Caroline song-writers, beginning with Thomas Carew, the finest stanza of whose most famous song is as follows :

“ Ask me no more where those stars light  
That downward fall in dead of night,  
For in your eyes they sit, and there  
Fixèd become as in their sphere ”.

And there is Sir John Suckling's equally famous song :

“ Out upon it, I have loved  
Three whole days together ;  
And am like to love three more,  
If it prove fair weather.  
Time shall moult away his wings  
Ere he shall discover  
In the whole wide world again  
Such a constant lover ”.

Andrew Marvell's *Garden* is not formally a song, but for the sake of its perfect verse and haunting cadences we will quote a stanza :

“ Meanwhile the mind, from pleasure less,  
Withdraws into its happiness :—  
The mind, that ocean where each kind  
Does straight its own resemblance find ;  
Yet it creates, transcending these,  
Far other worlds, and other seas,  
Annihilating all that's made  
To a green thought in a green shade ”.

If we analyse our impressions from these four non-Shakespearian quotations, we find that the pleasure they give is due to hope rather than fulfilment. Their sphere is the future and the cumulative rather than the immediate. They do not only give us beauty now, but lead us on by the promise of beauty to be, and are therefore concerned with time rather than eternity, with things mortal rather than immortal. To make this clearer,

## SHAKESPEARE'S SONGS

we will turn to the one poem of Herrick's where we find the true Shakespearian touch :

“ Cherry-ripe, ripe, ripe, I cry,  
Full and fair ones ; comes, and buy :  
If so be you ask me where  
They do grow? I answer, there  
Where my Julia's lips do smile ;—  
There's the land, or cherry-isle ;  
Whose plantations fully show  
All the year where cherries grow ”.

This has not Shakespeare's divine inconsequence, but it has his timelessness. Every word, apart from what has been or what is to be, is complete in itself because it touches the soul which is beyond time.

Bearing this in mind, we will return to Shakespeare—to the song of Ariel :

“ Full fathom five thy father lies ;  
Of his bones are coral made ;  
Those are pearls that were his eyes :  
Nothing of him that doth fade,  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange ”.

Then there is the song of Mariana in *Measure for Measure*:

“ Take, O take those lips away  
That so sweetly were forsworn ;  
And those eyes, the break of day,  
Lights that do mislead the morn ”.

And thirdly there is the dirge sung by the two brothers over Imogen in *Cymbeline* :

“ Fear no more the heat of the sun,  
Nor the furious winter's rages ;  
Thou thy worldly task hast done,  
Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages :  
Golden lads and girls all must,  
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust ”.

These poems formally express regret or lamentation, but as we read we are not conscious of their formal motive and still less of their dramatic setting. We merely submit ourselves to the impression of beauty ; we enter a

## SHAKESPEARE'S SONGS

world more beautiful and extensive than we had imagined. Nor are our impressions successive and divided as when we listened to the songs of Carew, Suckling, or Marvell. They are unified, and we develop in ourselves a higher faculty to cope with this larger world.

The ultimate pleasure of literature is the communion of souls, and our emotion from Shakespeare's songs is purer and nearer to music than from those of other poets because it is communicated almost entirely by the soul and only to a slight degree by the intellect. The lines produce their full effect when suddenly introduced into a play—another likeness to music—and they contain seeming-unpoetical words with no damage to beauty. All this bears witness to the undivided work of the soul.

The link between souls, the means of communication between one and the other, is imagination. Imagination is a faculty of the soul not the intellect, and when the poet's imagination works it forces the hearer's soul to respond. The unfortunate minor poet disdains humble things and accumulates high-sounding phrases, but they produce no effect because the soul, the imagination, behind them is lacking. Ruskin said that one of the tests of true greatness in a poet is daring reference to, or use of, mean and little things ; and he alludes to Dante who introduces the name of a street in Paris (*Rue de Fouarre*) into the midst of a description of the highest heavens.

Imagination, then, is a faculty of the soul, and as the soul is a heavenly thing, the work of imagination consists in irradiating the things of earth with the light of heaven. The earth taken alone is gross ; vulgarity consists in preoccupation with entirely earthly matters, in limiting our desires to sense ; vulgarity in a writer is realism, or reproduction of life on earth as it is. We call a realistic novel of contemporary life vulgar, but not the stories of Boccaccio—though they may not be moral according to Victorian standards—because, to borrow Keats's phrase, the stubble plains of earth are touched with light from the sunset clouds.



## SHAKESPEARE'S SONGS

We will consider the poet, the man of imagination, on earth, where he is something of a stranger and an exile, where he frequently causes scandal by his nonconformity. It is said that Boswell, in the middle of a drinking bout, would quote passages from devotional writers like Ogden, —and it strikes as incongruous. Mr. Arthur Symonds lately published an account of his first meeting with the French poet Verlaine at a café in Paris. Verlaine discussed Tennyson and Swinburne, praised the English Sunday, and then, “without transition, told some stories, rather shocking, in which he interrupted himself to find the exact English equivalent for the most unspeakable French words”. Shelley eloped with Mary Wollstonecraft, and then wrote to the forsaken Harriet that she will find in him a firm and constant friend to whom her interests will be always dear—by whom her feelings will never wilfully be injured. All these things are incongruous, and the reason is that poets, who work with their souls, are ill-fitted to handle earthly things. They show the defects of their qualities, for the poet deals in simile and metaphor,—it is his duty to discover unexpected likenesses and reconcile opposites,—but he can only do it with heavenly things, not earthly,—and so he lives in this lower world like a kind of fallen angel and offends men by his behaviour.<sup>1</sup>

We will now see him in his native element, using his divine faculty to the full. Every country in the world helps Othello to express his passion. He compares the course of his revenge to the meeting of the Pontic and Propontic, and his tears to the gum dropping from the Arabian trees. Lear appeals to the heavens that are

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Edmund Blunden, in his life of Leigh Hunt (Cobden-Sanderson, 1930), prints the following passage about Charles Lamb, in a letter written by Mrs. Novello: “Mr. Lamb has not improved his peevishness by having taken lately to theological subjects; he sometimes swears at the folly of infidels and calls us cursed heretics, and the next moment relates some blasphemous anecdote he told when in company with Mr. Irving the Scotch preacher”.



## SHAKESPEARE'S SONGS

old like himself ; Cleopatra calls on the universe to lament for Antony's mortal wound :

" O sun !  
Burn the great sphere thou movest in ; darkling stand  
The varying shore o' the world ".

Milton invokes his muse :

"— yet not alone while thou  
Visit'st my slumbers nightly, or when morn  
Purples the east ".

We read in the Book of Job : " Hast thou given the horse strength ? Hast thou clothed his neck with thunder ? " Shelley, in *Epipsychidion*, compares the beloved to " incarnate April ". One imaginative couplet has preserved Byron's *Maid of Athens*, otherwise an indifferent poem :

" By those tresses unconfined,  
Woo'd by each Aegean wind ".

In all these passages there is abrupt transition from a thing to its opposite, and the effect is the reverse of incongruous. The most unlike objects are put side by side, and suggest higher truth and ultimate reunion.

The poet is more native to heaven than earth because he works with his soul which is independent of time and space. The soul, even in its rare appearances, brings suggestions, perhaps memories, of a fuller life to those who walk the earth controlled by time and space and the logic of the intellect. We noticed timelessness as one of the qualities that separated Shakespeare, and in one instance Herrick, from their fellow song-writers. Unfortunately, during our earthly pilgrimage, we must observe these limitations, but all life—especially artistic life—consists in waiting for the soul to appear. Intellect is the soul's understudy ; it uses logic to organise the resources of language, and, by means of what is called *style*, create the illusion of that fuller life which is the soul's only. We admire the skill with which Horace or Maupassant concentrate in their respective stanza or

## SHAKESPEARE'S SONGS

sentence thoughts that with ordinary writers would occupy a whole poem or page ; but it is handicraft compared to Shakespeare. Yet we will make Shakespeare himself prove the distinction. The lines spoken by the disillusioned Macbeth about the witches,

“ That keep the word of promise to our ear,  
And break it to our hope ”,

are a miracle of concentration, but an example of style—the work of the intellect before the soul—a merely spectacular victory over time and space, which only the soul can achieve.

One of the oldest critical problems, from Aristotle onwards, is the joyful effect on the reader of terrible things : instead of lamenting the fate of a tragic hero we rejoice. But the solution may be that the author, working with his divine faculty of imagination, forces us to respond with our imagination,—and it is no small thing, suddenly, in our material surroundings, to hear the glad tidings that we have souls and are immortal. We thus return to our starting-point, that the ultimate pleasure of literature is the communion of souls. We rejected certain passages as Shakespeare's because we felt no throb of the soul behind them, and after glancing at some of the sublimest passages in the plays and noting that they were still bound to earth by the frailest of logical threads, we chose the songs as the purest manifestation of soul. We will now conclude with the song of Autolycus in the *Winter's Tale*, where in two stanzas are crowded all the virtues—beauty, rapidity, inconsequence, and the daring use of mean and little things :

“ When daffodils begin to peer,  
With heigh ! the doxy over the dale,  
Why, then comes in the sweet o' the year ;  
For the red blood reigns in the winter's pale.

“ The white sheet bleaching on the hedge,  
With heigh ! the sweet birds, O ! how they sing,  
Doth set my pugging tooth on edge ;  
For a quart of ale is a dish for a king ”.

## SHAKESPEARE'S SONGS

This phrase about mean and little things may still need explanation. It is that they have a special power to witness that the soul has appeared. There is something so wonderful about a human soul that when we see it we fall down and worship. When a ghost appears, what imports is not its actual words but the mere fact of its appearance. Artists of genius have the power to display their souls in varying degree ; in Shakespeare's songs his soul is visible in absolute purity, so that what imports is not the meaning of the words but the fact that they are spoken at all. Among friends logic enters into speech according to degree of intimacy : William Pitt judged a man by his faculty for talking nonsense. Imagine reunion with a beloved brother or sister—one who had shared a happy childhood, but from whom the accidents of life had divided us for twenty years. Then if ever our souls are active ; our conversation is not what is called sensible, but turns to the small things of the remembered home—the creaking staircase, the door that would not shut, the window that let in the rain—and they become more beautiful than a palace. And so when we read the dirge in *Cymbeline* we are not saddened ; when we read about a coffin in the song " Come away, come away, death ", in *Twelfth Night*, it is not a real coffin. Ophelia's song about her father's shroud is not macabre as it would be with Baudelaire. And the same with red noses and greasy maid-servants who scour pots. Imagination can work miracles by bringing heaven down to earth—as we saw with Boccaccio who could transmute sensuality into poetry. All these things are beautiful because they are communicated by the soul.

Therefore we conclude that the consummation of life and art is the soul-touch—and the result is joy of the purest kind—the joy of those who exchange mortality for immortality. There is nothing sorrowful or depressing in a true work of art—no matter how much earthly suffering it uses as material. Joy is the appropriate emotion of the soul, and when it fails it is because

## SHAKESPEARE'S SONGS

imagination has failed. Falstaff does nothing worse in the beginning than the end : he is equally a robber at Gadshill and in the house of Justice Shallow. He delights in the first play because Shakespeare's imagination soars, and offends in the second because it droops. We expect to grieve when Aeschylus describes the torments of Prometheus, Sophocles those of Oedipus, Shakespeare those of Lear and Othello : instead of which we rejoice. And yet the road to joy is through tears and renunciation : the statement that the most tragic scenes give the greatest pleasure must not mislead us. There are periods of great darkness when man does seem to be forsaken by God, and death stronger than love. We remember that for years Dr. Johnson could not bear to re-read *King Lear* because of Cordelia ; and Stevenson tells of someone who never could read *Othello* to the end because of the fate of Desdemona. It is otherwise with Shakespeare's songs : in these the heavens open without previous contrast. They are the soul's most instant and complete appearance, and their words are the kind that we shall speak to our friends on the day when we meet them in Paradise.





*Fact and Fiction*



## FACT AND FICTION

THE study of a great writer frequently produces an aftermath. Long after the volumes are closed certain of his ideas persist in the mind and demand further explication. With Carlyle one of the most determined "revenants" is his disparagement of fiction. He tells us in an early essay that the most hardened novel reader must now and then be assailed by the chilling qualm that all the mighty stir around him is but fantasy; and in one of the latest, that fiction has cousinship to lying. A fact is sacred, and Nature's fact the thought of the Eternal. All history is an inarticulate Bible, and every biography a message out of heaven. It is unfortunate that neither Shakespeare nor Goethe wrote history, because even Shakespeare's fact is more admirable than his fiction, and he might have made English history into an Iliad or even Bible. Yet Carlyle admits elsewhere that Shakespeare's plays are truer than reality, and that compared to the life of the soul, wars and Moscow retreats are like the somnambulism of uneasy sleepers.

He whom Bacon called "Jesting Pilate" asked "What is truth?" and would not stay for an answer. Is that a fact, and therefore sacred, simply because it has happened on this material plane, within the bounds of time and space? Is that fiction, and therefore related to falsehood, which has been truly imagined and therefore passed through a spiritual process?

The argument against fiction may sound formidable when supported by the "sacredness of the fact". It

## FACT AND FICTION

encourages us to find a soul of goodness in certain evil things, such as the people, with whom we are all familiar, who recognise no duties or interests outside their families, who judge all things from the personal point of view, who ignore politics—except in the sphere of taxation—who condemn philanthropy and extra-national service or missionary work, who make a fetish of such proverbs as “Do the duty that lies nearest”, or “Charity begins at home”. For the moment we will allow them the benefit of the argument that the fact is sacred, and we will reinforce it with some words written by one of the world’s elect—Jane Austen—during the Peninsular War: “How horrible it is to have so many people killed! And what a blessing that one cares for none of them!”

The ultimate court of appeal of every individual whose eyes dwell upon the printed page is the imagination—whether it is a newspaper or a fairy tale. Certain novelists base their plots on what is powerfully affecting the public at the moment—such as the events between 1914 and 1918—and so win ephemeral success; but they are merely taking a short cut to the imagination, like Ignorance to the Celestial City. As with writers of reminiscences that are indiscreet and nothing more, their flash of popularity is succeeded by total eclipse. Of the lately published autobiography of a cosmopolitan nerve-doctor—Axel Munthe<sup>1</sup>—a critic said that it contained enough material to furnish the writers of sensational short stories with plots for the rest of their lives. He tells us that the dancers at the Opera in Paris took ether as a stimulant. He gives a lurid pen-portrait of Maupassant, and describes the terrible glance of Charcot’s eye. When diphtheria broke out among the Italians in the Quartier Montparnasse, he operated on children by the light of a wretched oil-lamp, and frequently saw a child die under his knife. His assistant was a street-sweeper who stopped work and became a devoted nurse to the children, and even sold

<sup>1</sup> *The Story of San Michele* (Murray).

## FACT AND FICTION

his Sunday clothes to pay the undertaker who took away the body of a little girl. . . . Now it is obvious that these things produce their effect because they happened in a country that we know, among scenes more or less familiar, in our own age. It would require a short-story writer of genius, such as Maupassant, to touch the imagination with equal power by means of fiction.

Side by side with these we will place some "facts" from a far different book—W. H. Hudson's *Shepherd's Life*. He writes of the Wiltshire labourers, who supported wife and family on seven shillings a week—the most patient and submissive men in the world. In 1830 their livelihood was threatened by the introduction of machinery, but even in the height of their frenzy they did nothing outrageous and injured no man. They smashed the threshing machines, burnt some ricks, and the maddest broke into a few houses and destroyed their contents. They were not criminals but good brave men, and they were sent to those hells on earth, the penal settlements at the Antipodes, whence few ever returned.

Merely remarking that there are facts and facts, and that we will explain at some future time our different impressions from those of Axel Munthe and Hudson, we will pass on to the regions of pure imagination. We listen to Othello's words,

" Here is my journey's end, here is my butt  
And very sea-mark of my utmost sail ",

or to Milton,

" Sabaeen odours from the spicy shore  
Of Araby the blest ",

and our souls have found a home and are at peace.  
" Beauty is truth " we reply to jesting Pilate.

The effect of imagination is to make the world more wonderful and beautiful, because imagination is a faculty of the soul, and the soul, free from limitations of time and space, is all-knowing, whereas the intellect is a learner, tied to the thought of the age, and must advance



## FACT AND FICTION

step by step. From its height the soul can see likenesses in what appears to the intellect totally different things, and bring together the ends of the earth. The criticism that a great writer must be an exceptionally good man has been laughed out of court, and Sterne is instanced as proving the contrary ; but no Sterne, no Verlaine, can be bad at the moment of inspiration, because then the soul predominates, and the soul is one with God—with all that is good.

It is not only at the highest points of Shakespeare and Milton that we find this super-intellectual knowledge, and it is perhaps more helpful to note its presence or absence in humbler things. Carlyle's essay on Burns is considered a masterpiece, but in many ways is immature because it lacks imagination at the centre. He ascribes the ruin of Burns to a divided will,—and we know that at the time Carlyle's mind was occupied with this problem of want of unity. He is less directly stimulated by his subject than applying to it preconceived ideas. He is wrestling with it intellectually rather than passing through it imaginatively—as the astral body passes through material obstacles. In the same way, when he sums up Voltaire as a "persifleur", forgetful of his immense services to humanity, his Puritan upbringing acts like a drag on the wheel of pure thought. According to Pater, even Dante was guilty of a fixed idea in referring everyone to Hell, Purgatory, or Paradise : though Ruskin ascribed to Dante more imagination than has ever been contained in a human being. However, when Carlyle compares Marie Antoinette entering the Oeil-de-Boeuf to the moon glittering down the Eastern steeps, he sees through his subject and embodies an eternal truth of the universe, independent of the fact that such a queen did reign in the France that we know to form part of Europe according to history and physical geography. He summarises the part that loyalty and kingship have played throughout history in educating the human soul. He similarly sees through his subject when he exclaims, "There hovers

## FACT AND FICTION

the white Celestial ! " as Rohan penetrates the hornbeam arbour and discovers her whom he thinks to be the queen.

Emile Montégut, writing about Macbeth, over-stresses his feudal character. We see, he says, how heavily remorse weighed on the soul in the Middle Ages ; we divine the corroding strength of the secrets of feudal houses handed down from father to son like an evil heritage, to sap and finally destroy the family. This interests but does not convince because it tells us more about the critic than the poet. Montégut is making Macbeth an excuse to write about subjects that attracted him quite apart from the study of Shakespeare. But when he says that Richard III can assassinate without steel or poison or word or gesture, but simply because he exists ; or that the King in *All's Well* is typically French because Shakespeare could not attribute to an English king such absolute authority, as of a father,—then he sees through his subject and contributes something to Shakespeareology. Equally does Dr. A. C. Bradley see through his subject when he says that Shakespeare's heroes are exceptional beings but not eccentrics ; they are of the same stuff as ordinary men, but intensified ; and desire, passion, will, attain in them terrible force. The subject becomes illuminated by the energy of the mind that passes through it, and its rays, reflected back, cause the transpiercing mind to shine as never before. The two lights are merged in a new and strange one, to become a beacon on the highlands of literature.

Longfellow, if not a poet or creator, was certainly poetic, but we read these lines in *Evangeline* and refuse them the gift of imagination :

"Then would they say, 'Dear child! why dream and wait for him longer?  
Are there not other youths as fair as Gabriel? others  
Who have hearts as tender and true, and spirits as loyal?  
Here is Baptiste Leblanc, the notary's son, who has loved thee  
Many a tedious year ; come, give him thy hand and be happy'."

## FACT AND FICTION

They have the accents of a cultivated and tender-hearted man deeply touched by a story of affliction that has been repeated to him. He has not seen through his subject ; and one cause for his failure of vision is that these hexameters are not true hexameters. The extra pressure on the mind to make them true might have caused him to force his soul—so inseparably wedded in poetry are thought and words.

We might proceed indefinitely in this Venus-Psyche task of separating the seeds of intellect and imagination or partial and complete knowledge, but the fact emerges that truth is that which is truly imagined, or certified by the soul. An imaginative Elizabethan audience could appreciate a drama without the aid of realistic scenery ; it sufficed to display a board that the scene was Rome or Venice or the forest of Arden. In decadent Imperial Rome imagination was so withered that gladiatorial combats displaced the theatre,—men needing the stimulus of actual bloodshed to rouse them from their torpor. Renan said truly that the spirit of a century may be interpreted by the nature of the spectacles which have pleased it ; and we may take warning for our own age with its ever-increasing appreciation of prize-fights, and contests of excessive speed with motor-cars and aeroplanes. It proves what power is needed to fan the tiny spark of imagination yet left in those penned in their earthly cribs by the bars of time and space.

As the soul is true and eternal, the body an illusion, it would follow, if we were to carry strict logic into æsthetic matters, like the Germans, that imagination would be most true when least concerned with earthly things. Or like Socrates we should welcome death because the desires of the body hinder the soul from its perfect expression. Art, however, holds a middle course, and it is this which concerns us now. To the question whether we should have preferred Shakespeare to have invented his plots rather than accepted them from history and legend, our reply is in the negative. From this we

## FACT AND FICTION

will deduce that earth has a part to play in evolving the human soul.

We recall these sentences from Holinshed : “. . . she . . . counselled him . . . to make him aware, and shewed him the means whereby he might soonest accomplish it . . .” “. . . Then Donwald, though he abhorred the act greatlie in his heart, yet through instigation of his wife . . .” Out of this Shakespeare has wrought the splendour and terror of the temptation scene in *Macbeth*. *Romeo and Juliet* is the world's supreme love poem because before our eyes we see sense raised into soul. And here we touch the core of our problem, for, art being the highest human activity, and the object of life being to promote the growth of the soul, it follows that truth is that which is capable of being transmuted into soul, illusion that which is condemned to penal servitude in the dungeons of sense.

We know from the mystics that it is possible to attain immortality here on earth, but we are thinking rather of the soul that is becoming rather than become, and to which art with its Midas touch on earthly things is a constant helper. It was indiscriminating of Carlyle to approve all fact and condemn all fiction, but he did so because he was a transcendentalist who looked on nature as the living garment of God,—and it is on his credit side that he rated Shakespeare's plays as truer than reality. So long as he kept to the past all was well, and he succeeds in spiritualising such things as the knives and forks used by Johnson and Boswell at their suppers at the Mitre, now “ rusted to the heart”, or the “ siren finery ” of the poor outcast woman who approached Dr. Johnson in the street, long since “ ground into dust and smoke ”. But his theory led him astray when he saw heavenly meaning in the rise of modern Prussia. The organisation which he approved was real-policy, or the application of business methods to high politics ; and he mistook the sentimentalism of Frederick-William and Frederick the Great—a frequent trait in cruel persons—for true



## FACT AND FICTION

kindness and sensitiveness. There are certain facts only which can help the earth-bound soul in its aspirations towards heaven : others must relapse into chaos.

We will turn back to the two books already mentioned and compare their facts. On the whole the emotion to which Axel Munthe ministers is seldom higher than curiosity. When he describes the street-sweeper he is reflecting on the selfishness of the rich ; and the children dying of diphtheria are a contrast to the imaginary-sick idle persons who thronged his consulting room. These things are external adventures on the road of life ; they have not pre-existed in his soul and now flashed into revelation. To W. H. Hudson, on the other hand, born and brought up on the other side of the globe, and visiting England late in life, the Wiltshire labourers were no strange thing but a rediscovery of something already in the depths. Consequently he has transmuted his facts and led us within sight of the white plain of the soul.

Our conclusion is that only certain facts are part of the universe—those that can be used for soul-building—and that others belong to chaos. In the same way, certain fiction—that which has been truly imagined—is as true as fact. The common ground is spiritual experience ; and here we may recur to those persons of narrow sympathies, who judge everything from the personal standpoint, in whose evil things we professed to find a soul of goodness. The greatest earthly experience is to feel consciously the movement of the soul, and if even such a thing as narrow and exclusive family affection achieves this end, it is better than nothing, however disagreeable the sight may be. We say this with a side-remembrance of Irving's remark, " It's a pity the young man's best is so bad ".

The exaggerated importance which we attach to personal matters may be thus condoned, An earthquake thousands of miles distant, with its holocaust of victims, comes home to us less if, like Jane Austen, we know no



## FACT AND FICTION

one of them. Each of the victims has been a centre of hopes and affections, but they have not helped us to build our own soul ; and our own soul is after all part of the universe. We have been taught that indiscriminate alms-giving aggravates the evils it would reduce : yet the beggar whom we pass by costs us a pang of shame because of the direct appeal to ourselves.

Outside spiritual experience, therefore, and native to chaos are those facts which appeal only to sense, and that fiction which has not been truly imagined. It remains to ask how far the written word can compete with the actual events of our lives—the hopes and loves, meetings and partings, joys and bereavements—in stimulating the soul. We insisted that we preferred Shakespeare's plays should have a basis of fact rather than pure invention, and we have just finished dwelling on the exaggerated importance which our own earthly adventures assume to us : from which it may appear that we do favour Carlyle's theory. And yet, as all literature is ultimately addressed to the imagination, whether newspaper or fairy tale, so is the greater part of life. As we advance in years, more and more tends to become memory, and it is in our power to convert memories into imaginings and enter the world of timelessness. In reaction, the past becomes more beautiful than it really was—as beautiful as the world of Shakespeare. Equally, when we read Shakespeare, or any truly imagined writing, the words cause all the circumstances of our lives at the time of past re-readings—epoch behind epoch—to rise up once more,—but also become more beautiful. The effect of true fact and true fiction is therefore the same—to add an unsuspected beauty to earth, which is a promise of heaven.



*On Reading*



## ON READING

IN olden days it was considered a virtue to mind one's own business, but this is far from the truth now. To cultivate one's soul is to invite the charge of misapplying energies that might be used in the cause of "service" or for the benefit of the "community". From the days when Morley wrote of the "strutting self-importance of persons with private souls to save", we have been more and more condemned to an existence as outer as that of the Greeks, without the Greek compensations of beauty. To the loss of this inner sanctuary is due much of the modern unrest and discontent; and when we reflect on the precariousness of earthly life,—on so-called happiness based on hopes which in nine cases out of ten are never realised,—and on the solitary adventure of death which is the only certain thing for each one of us,—we wonder whether even such an ideal as the greatest happiness of the greatest number can be psychologically satisfying. It is too late to speak of the "Unknown God", but as an alternative we will suggest raising an altar to the "Rediscovered God"—the formation of a richer inner life.

According to Lafcadio Hearn, the cleavage between Eastern and Western thought is the idea of the soul. The Oriental Ego, he says, is not individual but a compound—"the concentrated sum of the creative thinking of previous lives"; and this sum-total of acts and thoughts is the "karma" that reincarnates. Many of us who have been formally trained to the first doctrine,



## ON READING

in practice subscribe to the second. Charles Maurras writing of the literary egoists, said it is not everyone who has a soul. That excellent but forgotten writer, W. R. Greg, maintained that no man is without the germ of a soul. We rather accept this latter view, and our present object is to suggest a part that reading may play in building the soul. We will become Easterns for the nonce and assume that the soul is a compound, and as "all compound things must change their character and conditions", it is in our power to enlarge and strengthen it here by means of the thoughts of others.

As our road has led back to the writers and critics of the past generation, we will continue upon it by recalling Frederick Harrison's essays on the choice of books. Every time, he says, you take up a book without a purpose you neglect the opportunity of taking up one with a purpose. Those who look upon reading as the one means of escape from the restraints of ordinary life into the land of ease, have opposed this theory. Morley who, by the way, affirmed that Frederick Harrison's treatise contained some of the wisest thought in the world on the subject, expressed with the greatest eloquence, suggested a middle course—that the reader should alternate between purposeful and disinterested reading. (Elsewhere he alludes to disinterested reading as one of the sweetest of human relaxations.) We will suggest a still further subdivision, keeping in mind our one aim of cultivating the soul. With this we can be as thorough as the specialist, but with an infinitely wider field in which to work. We would hearken with more patience than Hamlet to Polonius's account of the various forms of drama.

Prof. Saintsbury has said that the object of literature is delight, its soul is imagination, and its body is style. In other words, only that work of art lives in which the author has located his soul. If it is true, as some critics say, that English poetry excels even Greek, the reason is that it contains more imagination, though confined within a less perfect body : as an equable, golden climate

## ON READING

may be excelled in beauty by one which is subject to startling irregular phenomena of nature such as thunderstorms or shooting stars. But imagination is the greatest thing in life as well as literature. Such a thing as the present separated from the past and future hardly exists. Every step we take on the road of life is affected by remembrance of the past and consideration for the future : even though, in the thought of Marius the Epicurean, the past has ceased to be and the future may never come. The wise among us endeavour to convert memories and speculations into imagination, because only through imagination can we recapture the beauty and happiness of the past. To remember is to do little more than enumerate to oneself former events, and the result is frequently disappointing—as when we reread our old letters or diaries. To imagine is to meditate upon the fragments supplied by memory until they become a picture where the inward essence shows through the outer form : for which reason the highest form of personal beauty is expression,—and Pater quotes Leonardo da Vinci's saying that the smiling of women is one of the two most wonderful sights in the world. And in this spirit Wordsworth listened to the cuckoo till he could beget again the golden time of his childhood. If then the best of literature and life is imagination, the problem of reading is how to convey across the frontier of the soul the literary imaginings of others and use them as building material. We are to become a part not only of all that we have met, like Tennyson's Ulysses, but of all that we have read.

If it be granted that we read neither to collect facts nor gain information, but to add to our inner experience, we must first eliminate journalism and prose fiction, because there is lacking a fair exchange of imagination between writer and reader. Macaulay has been called a journalist of genius, and the reason is that he did not so much imagine his subject as skilfully select facts and artistically present them : as to-day's leading article

## ON READING

tempts and allures the imagination with subjects in which it is already interested. The subject of fiction is more provocative, and we are not forgetting Jane Austen's defence of her art as that which gives scope for "the greatest powers of the mind, the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language". But her previous remark that novelists' productions "have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world", proves too much. The first duty of a work of art is to give pleasure, but not that kind of pleasure which consists in passive surrender to agreeable impressions. Carlyle said (perhaps unjustly) that the *Waverley* novels are supreme if the object of literature is to please the indolent man who lies on a sofa. The kind of reading that we are advocating requires active not passive imagination, and we must face initial disappointment and long self-discipline. It is true that we gain little profit from books that we do not enjoy, as Dr. Johnson and others have said,—but the pleasure is a deferred one, and the student must take thought for to-morrow's pleasure rather than exhaust to-day's.

To continue with the anatomy of fiction,—it is admitted that the novel is the most quickly passing literary form because it deals with contemporary manners. The writer has only to mention certain topics and the reader's imagination is already pledged: the heroine from Mayfair or Belgravia awakes other associations than the heroine from Suburbia. It is not denied that great novelists possess the highest imagination, but their art requires them to use it in ordering and illuminating their material rather than transmuting it. The form of the novel is elastic, and the roll of novelists is miscellaneous enough to include poets such as the Brontës or Thomas Hardy who possess the transmuting power. Thus Thackeray's *London* would have been familiar to a great many people,—but earthly eye has not seen the Brussels

## ON READING

of Charlotte Brontë,—and Dorchester which can be reached in a few hours from London is not the Casterbridge of Thomas Hardy. However, the main duty of the novel is to portray contemporary manners, and charm the reader's imagination with scenes and characters and problems that are part of his daily life. It comes home to our business and bosoms in a sense not wholly favourable, for the object of education is to create interest in impersonal matters. Partly, therefore, because much fiction deals with a concentrated and illuminated but not a transmuted world, and depends for its power of appeal on the reader's daily experience,—and partly because a good novel is too easy and pleasant to read to call forth the reader's full powers, we reject it as an instrument of the highest culture.

The doctrine that we derive little profit from books that do not give us pleasure is true with a reservation,—but we must make a venture of faith before we receive the pleasure. Frederick Harrison insisted on the importance of the classics, and when books have been consistently admired for more than two thousand years we may be certain that there is pleasure awaiting us. A good book improves with rereading—as the light from furthest planets takes longest to reach our earth. The reverse is also true, for as we discover more and more in Shakespeare, so the contemporary poet who delighted us at first has become extinct when we reopen him in a few years' time—his fairy gold turned to withered leaves. That masterpieces can only be valued after repeated and deferred reading, while books which give immediate pleasure are usually negligible,—and yet pleasure is the ultimate aim of reading—all this proves the need for a preliminary act of faith. But granted that we have overcome these difficulties, that we have assimilated a score of the best books in the world—the distilled thought of its poets, philosophers, historians—that we have read and reread them with ever-increasing delight, and hope to do so for the rest of our lives,—have we so



## ON READING

transformed our minds that our friends hardly know us ? The answer is Yes—by becoming a part of all that we have read.

Ruskin blamed those who wish to find in books only echoes of themselves, who delight in the book of which they can say, "That's just what I thought !" He maintained that the object of reading is to assimilate the thoughts of others. But there is a middle theory based on the principle that pleasure—though of a deferred kind—is the object of reading ; and we will take the example of J. S. Mill, the cause of whose mental crisis was failure to assimilate thoughts that were alien to his emotional nature. In this crisis he admitted that if all the objects in his life were realised, if all the changes in institutions and opinions to which he looked forward could be completely and instantly effected, the result would not be happiness for himself. It is significant that what helped him to regain health of mind was reading Wordsworth's poetry. J. S. Mill does not strike the present age as a very sympathetic character. In his letters he writes that he would not greatly grieve if a revolution destroyed all who had over five hundred a year : doubtless many amiable people would perish, but the world could do without them. We rather applaud Disraeli's remark, "The finishing governess !" when Mill made his first speech in the House of Commons ; but we must remember that it was the stern discipline imposed from earliest years by his tyrannical father that dried up the emotional stream ; and the fact that Wordsworth's poetry could stimulate the flow is not without meaning.

Our object, therefore, is not to impose alien things upon the mind, but to give it something with which it can deal emotionally, until from small beginnings the power to feel is infinitely extended. Like Ruskin we deprecate the saying, "That's just what I thought !" but we will transform it into "That's what I hope to think !" We must transcend ourselves, and by entering



## ON READING

into the thoughts of others gain a richer individuality. Shakespeare was great because he was universal, because he could live imaginatively the lives of others. It is in the reader's power to effect this extension of personality by means of the imaginings of others. Mill acted wisely when he closed his political economy and opened Wordsworth's poems.

An imaginative passage is the work of the writer's soul before his intellect. It reveals the object in its relation to the universe, not merely to this lower world, because that which proceeds from the soul is free from time and space. The reader who assimilates it will be happier as from a spiritual experience : as his emotional nature is enriched by the human attachments which appeal to his soul. Only here, for love at first sight we must substitute at least second, and perhaps third or fourth or even more, with long intervals between the times when he approaches the object of his affections. But the more of such experiences he acquires the more they will stay with him and become part of himself. His inward light will grow, there will be change of seasons, with longer days and shorter nights in the country of the soul, until darkness is put to flight and he dwells in a land of the midnight sun .

The more extensive and imaginative our feeling the remoter it is from personal needs, and is therefore not inspired by the books that come home to our business and bosoms. Our own parish is no longer the centre of all things, but a mere speck in the immensity. If true culture at the present day is at a standstill, the reason is that "business and pleasure", in the words of James Bryce, "are the two and only deities of this latest phase of humanity". It is needless to say that both business and pleasure encourage the earthly and possessive self. As culture proceeds it relaxes effort to advance the cause of self in the material world ; it discards those books which appeal to sense, which are utilitarian, and reproduce the reader's own circumstances. The emotional

## ON READING

centre still remains, and man is still the measure of all things,—but an infinitely enlarged and extended man. He pities the victim's fall not because he fears a like fate for himself, but because it is the order of the universe. To complete the ideal course is to attain something of the Virgilian pity, the sense of the "tears of things".

There rises to the mind the contrast of two of the world's great catastrophes as handled by two great writers. Here are some of Voltaire's lines on the earthquake of Lisbon :

"Lisbonne, qui n'est plus, eut-elle plus de vices  
Que Londres, que Paris, plongés dans les délices ?  
Lisbonne est abîmée, et l'on danse à Paris.

Un dieu vint consoler notre race affligée ;  
Il visita la terre, et ne l'a point changée !  
Un sophiste arrogant nous dit qu'il ne l'a pu !  
'Il le pouvait', dit l'autre, 'et ne l'a point voulu :  
Il le voudra, sans doute' ; et tandis qu'on raisonne,  
Des foudres souterrains engloutissent Lisbonne,  
Et de trente cités dispersent les débris,  
Des bords sanglant du Tage à la mer de Cadix".

If style is the body of literature and imagination the soul, we have here a beautiful body without a soul. It is an anti-clerical outburst appealing through physical horror and fear for one's material safety ; and the emotion is akin to the earthly one of anger.

Now there are few more terrible things in literature than the description of the break up of the Athenian camp before Syracuse, and the subsequent destruction of the army at the Assinarus River. In the first scene the wounded, who are left behind, follow as far as their strength endures, and call by name upon their friends who are marching away ; and, in the second, the army, become a mob and maddened by thirst, fights to drink the fouled water. And yet horror is tempered and ultimate reconciliation suggested, because the deeply meditative mind of Thucydides sees these things in their relation to the universe, not to one corner of the

## ON READING

earth,—to the whole of time, not to one epoch of history. Terrible as they are, revealing a tragic gloom far beyond the power of Voltaire, it is out of this power that comes salvation. For though these earthly wrecks and despairs appal us, we look up from chaos to the great mind that broods above, that mediates between ourselves and God: as Charles Lamb said that when we read *King Lear* we become Lear, “we are in his mind, we are sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storms”.

There is, however, a reader even more ideal than Lamb, and it is he whom Dryden called “that celestial thief John Milton”. In the few instances that we shall quote, he did not improve upon what he borrowed, yet we read the originals with greater pleasure when we know Milton, and we read Milton with greater pleasure when we know the originals,—because proof is actually given that someone has become part of all that he has read,—since the soul can do imaginative work not with external knowledge but only with what is its very self and substance. His “adamantine chains and penal fire” and thunder that “bellows through the vast and boundless deep” are the “*αδαμαντίνων δεσμῶν ἐν ἀρρηκτοῖς πέδαις*” and “*βρονχία δ’ ἤχῳ παραμυκᾶται βροντῆς*” of Aeschylus (*Prometheus*). Satan and his crew “lie vanquished rolling in the fiery gulf”, like Virgil’s Titans “fulmine dejecti fundo volvuntur in imo”. Belial “could make the worse appear the better reason”, like Plato’s Socrates. In *Lycidas* we read of the “tangles of Neaera’s hair”, and in Horace, “Dic et argutae properet Neerae Murreum nodo cohibere crinem”.

And the reason why this derived imagination gives added pleasure is because it emphasises the social character of literature—that literature is not a solitary occupation but something that depends on communion of minds. There is no love of things, only of persons; and love of books is a means to secure love of one’s fellow creatures. To have read a book in common is a link

## ON READING

between two individuals, and an eminent living statesman has said, " If I see a person's eye light up at a familiar quotation, he is my brother, whether duke or dustman ". A pleasure is not complete unless it is shared, and when we are enchanted by an author we wish our friends to share the emotion—often in vain—as Tressilian lamented that Amy Robsart would not read his favourite volumes. To have assimilated passages like those mentioned of Thucydides is to have enriched our souls and made ourselves worthy to receive more love from our friends : and so, through annihilation of our earthly self, we find our true and heavenly self. And if literature is a social thing, the ideal reading is aloud, when we see this love in the making, when the lofty mood is heightened by the presence of others, and we are beyond time and space, conscious of our souls, and like gods to one another. Hence a most ideal figure was the wandering minstrel or troubadour, whose enviable part it was to kindle fine emotions in assembled companies of fair women and brave men.

*Education*





## EDUCATION

**B**ETWEEN education as it should be to fit man for the life of the spirit, and as it is to fit man for the modern life of competition, a cleft has opened which passes ingenuity to bridge. It is the fashion to say that all must work, that the world has no room for a leisured class ; and this at once abolishes true culture which cannot be attained in less than three generations. The highest truths are only learned by meditation, but meditation teaches that this outer world does not really exist. The person of meditative habit will be undecided and uncertain ; whereas he who works for a living or a superfluity, if he would succeed, must be positive and self-assured. The best education unfits those who receive it from earning their living.

It is not difficult to imagine that state of mind which doubts the existence of the material world. We need only repeat to ourselves a familiar word to find it dissolve into unmeaning sound, or think fixedly of some event of our own past to make us wonder whether indeed it happened. Nor is the old saying without point—that the eagerly pursued material prizes of life bring little happiness when attained. Likewise, the frequent complaints of ingratitude for material benefits quickly forgotten, show their illusory nature. This disbelief in the reality of matter is the dividing line between the leisured and the working classes—using the latter term of those who work only for their material interest. On the worser side it makes for flippancy,

## EDUCATION

indifference, lack of serious purpose,—but on the better, it absolves from opinion and positiveness, from anger in its darker forms, and helps to convince that the only truths are spiritual.

We will better understand the constitution of the money-maker of the first generation if we glance at the distinction drawn by Ruskin between a gentleman and a vulgar person. A gentleman appears reserved, he says, not because he feels little but because he feels habitually—because a feeling seldom touches him that has not touched him before and is touching him always. A vulgar person, if the pathos of a thing can be forced upon him, will become excited about it because the sensation of pity is new to him and wonderful. For the present we will leave these thoughts fluid in the mind and pass on to remark that man's nature is subdued to what it works in,—that the object of education is spiritual development, but the money-maker refuses the life of the spirit or he would not develop the competitive and aggressive qualities whereby he succeeds. He is ready to find fault and suspect evil because he believes in his heart that all men are born enemies. He takes nothing seriously except money, and despises any pleasures but those of the senses. He is terrible in his anger because certain—certain that the material law has been broken. He contradicts roughly those who do not agree with him, because he is impatient at the raising of doubts which for him do not exist. He has fixed opinions on all subjects, which he holds with autocratic intolerance, and resents disagreement as a sign of personal hostility.

The second generation may be called “half-educated”. Handicapped by example and Jesuitical bringing-up, they are bound to the material plane, and can only leave it as far as the short, definite length of their tether allows. But they know vanity and social ambition, and look upon education as a means of impressing their neighbours and rising in the social scale. Art is a practical thing for them, not the attainment of a state of mind—an elegant

## EDUCATION

accomplishment, something to be produced and worn upon occasions like fine clothes. It does not permeate the whole of their lives—it is not touching them always, as Ruskin said. Like a game of skill it can be acquired by cleverness and hard work ; it is not that where you feel the pressure of a dedicated life. This is not to deny them the possibility of true taste, true appreciation, but it is only when the page is open before them or the picture present to their eye. They have not the courage to see that education means denial of the canon law of their fathers. When matter and spirit conflict they are always on the side of matter. They remain divided between old and new, uncertain how to treat their children who disregard the traditions of the terrible first generation who still haunt their own dreams ; but they are delighted if their children's intellectual successes bring social recognition, and they encourage them to win prizes at school in order to boast of them before the world ; and if these children, in later years, can use their art to make money, then all indeed has been for the best. They can be tolerant in impersonal matters, but not in what concerns themselves.

To the third generation it becomes possible to sever the tie with the material plane, and follow art as one of the main roads to the land of the spirit. There are perils in the way such as degeneracy, and “ the hardest of all tests, prosperity ” ; but if they overcome these, then the seed of education can bear fruit an hundredfold. Since “ money is freely given them ”, they have not to earn a living, and therefore attach less importance to material things. They have no need for combative and competitive faculties and can look down impartially on the arena of life and make decisions independent of personal loss or gain. They do not contradict because they are not certain enough about anything, and they do not make excuses because they lack the self-protective habit. With no constantly recurring material crises, they can take long views of life, and therefore realise

## EDUCATION

that the only certain thing is death. It is said that the man of action should live as if he never had to die. 'The man of leisure lives continuously with the thought of death. And this consciousness that earthly things are unstable, and the world of sense an illusion, eliminates the black streak in his anger, which darkens the aura of the materialist.

As an illustration of the mentality of the first and second generations we will turn to the lives of Frederick-William of Prussia and his son Frederick the Great. Frederick-William, though born a king, was, materially, a self-made man, and his nature became subdued to materialism by the things in which it worked. He was the first to apply business methods to politics, and to create real-policy. Understanding that the army was the heart and pith of Prussia, and if it failed she would be a prey to enemies, he made it his business to perfect the army, and he extended military discipline over the whole country, striking idle loungers, and not suffering even apple-women to sit without knitting. His recruiting methods cast an anxious shadow over the whole rural population. Himself of Spartan habits, he reduced the royal household to the lowest footing of the indispensable, and saved money yearly. He was consciously ignorant of all beyond his own small horizon of personal survey, and despised the finer things of life, such as art. He had commanded the Prince's tutors to infuse in him a true love of soldiering and economics, and refrain from Latin or lingo of old dead heathens. When, to his horror, he discovered these instructions were set at nought, and the Prince was engaged in learning Latin, he burst into the room and assaulted the teacher with a cane. Indeed the taste which the Prince showed for "Athenian-French delicacies", for flute-playing rather than hunting, for the verse of Voltaire, etc., had tragic consequences. It seemed to the King that the solid earthly fortune which he had collected with infinite pains would be dissipated by his dreamer of a son.



## EDUCATION

Like all materialised persons Frederick-William was terrible in his anger, and like all such he found it difficult to believe in death. Like Ruskin's Philistine, to whom the sensation of pity is new and wonderful, he wept tenderly for the death of his uncle, George I,—the uncle who had been good to him as a boy. When his own hour struck, among his emotions was surprise that death had caught him—that he must indeed leave such realities as well-drilled army, full treasury, and rows of tight human dwellings built over reclaimed swamps and scraggy waste places. Positive to the last, when he heard the line of a favourite hymn, "Naked I came into the world, and naked shall I go", he interposed, "Not quite naked; I shall have my uniform on!"

Frederick the Great's culture was typical of the second generation. He had true but superficial musical and literary taste. He did not deal in meditation and introspection, as Carlyle truly said, but "his stream of verse was fluent and shallow", and all through life "he was subject to a leakage of verses". Macaulay sees him, at the crisis of the Seven Years' War, "with an ounce of poison in one pocket and a quire of bad verses in the other". He had education enough to understand that things of the mind ranked first, and vanity enough to desire what should make him most honoured among the best men. The example of the French Academy caused him to found a poor imitation at Berlin. His connection with Voltaire is too notorious to re-discover. Being of the second generation, his culture was dust in the balance against practical claims; yet the two streams did meet when one of his motives for invading Silesia was the desire to see his name in the gazettes.

As Frederick the Great had no children, our tree of speculation is lopped in the direct line, and we must continue on more general terms. Our concern is now with the third generation who are absolved from the struggle for material things. It is a fact that such things cannot satisfy the human soul, that those who inherit

## EDUCATION

them without a struggle, whose hopes are not constantly baffled or renewed in their pursuit, feel their unreality. Life therefore becomes empty for them, death ever present as the one certain thing in a fleeting world ; and from this grows a meditative habit of mind. There are many ways of filling the emptiness—from the mere pleasure-seeker to the disinterested public servant ; but apart from all these, and above perhaps even the latter, is the pursuit of culture, which is the true object of leisure, and, except with genius, possible only in the third generation. It can exist, as we saw, truly but intermittently with the second generation, but it requires the meditative habit of mind for its complete expression. It should not be confused with day-dreaming, and can be acquired neither by the idler nor the amateur, since to think is harder than to act, and there is no self-discipline so laborious to attain as that of the thoughts. We have the warnings of Maupassant, that an author should not divide too strictly his hours of work and leisure ; and of Trollope, that “ to think of a story is much harder work than to write it . . . as you lie in bed, or walk about, or sit cosily over your fire ”.

For cultural purposes, periodical re-reading of great authors is better than mechanical learning by heart. The mind should not be a museum, but a place like Virgil's Elysium where Anchises has no fixed abode. Lines like this from Othello's speech to the Senate,

“ Of hair-breadth 'scapes in the imminent deadly breach ”,

or from Horace (*Odes*, III, 23),

“ Nam quae nivali pascitur Algidio . . . ”

suddenly recurring to the mind at intervals, affect with an added beauty that will increase with time and thus found a private tradition of beauty : because the individual mind has contributed something from the deep places in which the words have been buried. And the same is true of beautiful scenes in nature. The peace

## EDUCATION

of field or woodland, the reflection of flowers in water, reappear to the inner eye with a silence and mystery that their outer forms had not.

The important thing, therefore, is what the mind adds, but the outer object has its part to play in stimulating the working of the mind. Every human institution has a soul of a kind—every house, school, regiment, town, country. They are all haunted by the thoughts of the generations. Dowden, in interpreting *Macbeth*, reminded us that the sins of the past taint the atmosphere. The Weird Sisters, before they vanish, exclaim, "Fair is foul and foul is fair", and the first words spoken by Macbeth are, "So foul and fair a day I have not seen". He has felt their influence, and uses their actual words because he is sensitive to evil, whereas Banquo who accompanies him is untouched. This may sound an ill-omened comparison; however, Myers wrote that a mass of emotion had gathered round certain lines of Virgil "till they come to us charged with more than an individual passion . . . with the anguish of all partings . . ." According to Prof. Gilbert Murray, the driving of Jehu, although only mentioned once in the Bible, has passed into a proverb because intensely imagined. Emerson said that a person's quotations reveal something of his character; and the fact that one may not quote a writer's quotations unacknowledged, proves that his mind has added something to the passage. All this points to a finer immaterial world, intersecting the world of sense, and only to be entered through the gates of meditation. All the beautiful thoughts struck out of appreciative readers by contact with the great passages in literature, continue to exist in the immaterial envelope of our material world, and are waiting to be drawn upon and returned with interest by the marching generations.

The object of education, therefore, should be to stimulate the meditative powers. Let the mind be so disposed in calm that fragments, lines, half-remembered

## EDUCATION

passages of Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, present themselves unsought, each time with increase of beauty. But this private tradition which the individual builds up in himself becomes a tributary to the common store. And what the common store has received it gives back to the open mind, so that there is a constant ebb and flow between the individual human soul and the world soul created through the centuries by the thoughts of the cultured. Our aim, therefore, should be to become citizens of this immaterial world,—so to dispart the interests from matter and wed them to art and nature, that the memory of beautiful things, in sound, colour, line, return unsought in disengaged moments, and at each return with added richness and strangeness. This is what the individual contributes to the community, and at his death he leaves his city a little more celestial than he found it.

A person of such habits will naturally be a poor member of the workaday world, as we may see from some examples of genius where the peak of culture has been attained. It was doubted whether A. J. Balfour really cared about anything ; and the story has been told that he once declined to buy a house with two staircases because he knew he would be for ever hesitating which to use. A witness described him as “uninterested” during a critical meeting of the War Cabinet ; and in Paris he joked openly about the farce of the peace terms shortly to be presented to the Germans. To Carlyle it was agony to enter a shop to make a purchase. Pater at once left an hotel in which anyone spoke to him. Emily Brontë was keenly interested in the fortunes and family histories of her neighbours down to the minutest detail, but with them she rarely exchanged a word. Bacon wrote lists of resolutions, the first of which was “to be more bold” in social intercourse. He advised students to take copious notes, because “writing maketh an exact man” ; but the utmost disorder prevailed in his own household. Addison needed wine to stimulate



## EDUCATION

his powers, and escape defeat in conversation from his inferiors. Boswell, in his doubt, demanded assurance after assurance of friendship from Johnson, till the latter bade him write it in his notebook and refer to it at intervals. Coleridge admitted that there was something of Hamlet in himself: and Hamlet, after all, is the supreme type of the super-educated man. A famous chapter in a famous biography tells how Coleridge was ever unable to determine which side of the path would suit him best. Irresolution is the hall-mark of these persons because sub-consciously they disbelieve in the reality of earth. There are times, however, when they are called upon to act, and then they find themselves at a disadvantage with those of an infinitely lower mental development, but earth-born and therefore Titans in strength, with power to argue and dispute and protect themselves, and decide instantly,—and terrible in their anger because convinced that this outer world is real. The first time Robespierre spoke in the Assembly Mirabeau marked him as a dangerous man because he believed every word he said. At the foot of the mental ladder we find the utmost positiveness and self-assurance, ever diminishing as we ascend, till we reach Socrates who declared that he knew nothing,—and Shakespeare, whose latest message to the world was that we are of the stuff of dreams . . . Speaking collectively, artistic races, like the Poles or Irish, are notoriously unreliable in material things, and difficult to govern.

Thus it will be found that, to the uninitiated, persons of the highest culture will seem insincere, double-faced, ready to agree with each in turn, without convictions or opinions. But the underlying reason is their uncertainty of the reality of the material world, their faint conception of an earthly order. It does not seem worth while to take sides in a dispute—the prize for over-coming in an argument is not worth the heat of contest. They are a separate race, only touching the earth at points, in so far as they are dependent on the less fortu-



## EDUCATION

nate crowd for the necessities of life. They are exempt from the pains of toil, but they feel little pleasure,—and for them the cloud of death rests unmoved upon the furthest peak of the range that bounds life's pilgrimage.

Until recently the object of education was to attain such a state of being, but in modern times it is doubted whether there is room for non-combatants in the battle of life. The result of inherited wealth through three generations was a kind of Limbo, on whose inhabitants the toiling world looked with admiration, and prayed that their descendants might join. Democracy has changed all this ; laws are made by those who believe that matter is real ;—and, according to Mr. H. G. Wells, the true heroes of the world are its great business men. If there is a quality needed for success in business it is positiveness, certainty, conviction of the reality of life : and this is exactly opposed to the higher education. We are therefore at the parting of the ways—or rather at the point where one road curves back to an earlier world in which competition is the law and men do not wish to escape it—and the other is so thinly followed that it will soon present what Thomas Hardy called the most desolate of all sights—an abandoned highway. That it will be possible to reconcile the two does not seem likely ; for education, as we saw in considering the second generation, is not a part-time thing but of the whole life. And this also reflects on the power of the busiest individual to keep a small inner sanctuary into which he may retire on occasions. That it will reduce the numbers of truly educated persons, through public indifference or discouragement, is fairly certain. Yet there are a few consolations to be recorded—even in the midst of an industrialised, commercialised, mechanised world. We live in an age of transition and know not what the morrow may bring forth. It is a fact that material things fail to satisfy. The old culture is worth preserving, and those who do so are employed in a noble task. He who reads and re-reads a great poet and

## EDUCATION

reflects upon the lines in his leisure moments is doing his share. It would be vain to prophesy that the world will revert to a condition in which the old culture will hold the highest place, but in the hope that such things may be, we will close with a suggestion that a kind of monastic order be formed by those who are resolute enough to withstand the temptation of more money making, who, satisfied with a little, will lead simple lives, studying the great books, meditating upon them, interchanging messages with that finer world, which, like Plato's Absolutes, is visible only to the mind.



*The Victorian Age*





## THE VICTORIAN AGE

THE enquirers into the most notable errors of the Victorian Age resemble the Chorus of old men who, with suppliant boughs wreathed with wool, appear before the palace at the opening of the *Oedipus* of Sophocles, and implore the King to discover the cause of the pestilence which is polluting the land. Or they may be compared with the two aldermen in *Don Quixote* who lost a donkey and agreed to walk on opposite sides of the hill, braying at intervals, in the hope of an answer from the donkey. Again and again, to each, as he played his part, there came a counter-bray ; but, alas ! it proceeded not from the throat of the donkey, but from his friend. In vain they described wider circles—only to be inevitably re-attracted into each other's braying orbit. Such will ever be the fate of those who treat symptoms rather than causes, as so far has been the practice of the apologists or detractors of the Victorian Age. The most important thing of an age, as of an individual, is belief, and the progressive moral deterioration of Victorian times may be ascribed to failure of transcendentalism. Man must have belief of some kind, and when the unseen world is withdrawn, he finds it in the seen. The religious instinct can be perverted but not killed, for man needs something to abate his loneliness, and if he has not God within him, it must be his fellow-man without. The belief of the Victorians, from certain causes, became a kind of humanism, rising at its best to hero-worship, and sinking at its worst, through snobbishness,

## THE VICTORIAN AGE

to Mammon-worship. Typical of the age were Carlyle's *Hero-worship* and Thackeray's *Book of Snobs*.

The predominant social influence of the Victorian Age came from the middle classes, and the hard core of these was the newly-powerful commercial class. Their influence radiated on all sides, owing to political and economic conditions. It has been said that after the Reform Bill of 1832 the aristocracy needed the help of the middle classes against the masses, and therefore adopted—externally at least—something of their manners. Economically, the pressure of population, increase of cost of living, and severer struggle for existence, heightened men's absorption in and dependence upon material things. Man's nature, like the dyer's hand, is subdued to what it works in,—and the creed of industrialism and commercialism is money or money's worth. The unseen world was blotted from consciousness, and beauty, its equivalent in the world of sense, was disregarded for utility. Railways broke the silence of the country, and hideous streets and slums disfigured the towns. A transformation no less unsightly took place in the human mind.

Carlyle defined hero-worship as "the adamant below which things will not fall, and the corner-stone whence reconstruction shall begin". Swinburne, who was pagan-natured, expresses the whole idea of idolatry in the account of his visit to Landor : "I am not sure that any other emotion is so endurable and persistently delicious as that of worship, when your god is indubitable and incarnate before your eyes". The essence of religion is faith, not sight ; our most fruitful religious moments are when we are communing silently with God, not observing forms and ceremonies : as we learn more from books in meditating half-consciously over their contents than in systematic reading. With the disappearance of the unseen world, man became responsible only to man. It is possible to deceive one's fellow-creatures, but not God ; it is possible to persuade the world one has all

## THE VICTORIAN AGE

the virtues, when one's soul is a poor thing. The result is a painful divorce between preaching and practice, and a false public opinion.

There are some who say that human nature never changes, others that it has never ceased to change. We incline to the latter, but admit that it does not change in a day. During the time of transition, there reigned in Victorian England a hypocrisy without parallel in the ages of the world. The Victorian, who served his own material interests, maintained that he was serving God. To make and save money was a sacred duty, and if he overworked his subordinates in the process, it was for the benefit of their souls.<sup>1</sup> The Gospel of Work—approved by Carlyle—was the disguised Gospel of Mammon. The present post-War materialism is at least honest, and is not mistaken by those who profess it for religious ecstasy. The modern business man has a fine scorn for matters of the pure intellect, and makes money in order to enjoy the good things of the world, but he does not drape his idol in nun's veiling.

The "great man", now sadly touched by the mildew of time, bears witness to Victorian hero-worship. Tennyson was compared with Milton; Jowett was Socrates and Dr. Johnson in one. The sum of Tennyson's achievement, viewed through modern eyes, is a few exquisite early poems: one half-pennyworth of bread to an intolerable deal, not of sack, but of those thin potations which Falstaff so strongly contemned. The result of loss of faith in the unseen world, and wish to see their god incarnate before their eyes, led the Victorians to worship any form of success. Nothing existed for them unless someone knew it; in charities, the deeds of the right hand were no secret from the left. The same awful

<sup>1</sup> "The employer of the first half of the nineteenth century was a hard man, but he was hard to himself as well as to his hands. It has been said that he worked like a slave and ruled like a slave-master. But there can be no question that in so living he thought himself a good patriot, and even a good Christian." W. R. Inge, *England*, p. 214.

## THE VICTORIAN AGE

reverence with which they regarded their celebrities, was bestowed in lesser degree on any form of human distinction. Not only was snobbishness a companion religion to hero-worship, but the smallest position was dignified with mystical authority. Between parents and children, schoolmasters and pupils, employers and employed, editors and contributors, publishers and authors, the old and the young,—a gulf existed that does not exist at present.

From the novelists we learn most of the spirit of an age. In the elder Osborne of *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray portrayed the typical early Victorian business man. A tyrant to his family, a merciless competitor in the market, he yet fell down and grovelled before a lord. He encouraged his son to entertain youths of noble families, in spite of the financial strain. He approved his son's engagement to Amelia Sedley because she had every prospect of a good dowry, but when old Sedley failed and the money vanished, he ordered the engagement to be broken off, and he turned like a viper on Sedley who had been his benefactor. After his son's death, when accused of having treated him harshly, he exclaimed in self-vindication, "I gave him plenty of money!" He relented towards Dobbin because he had read his name in the papers among the guests at fashionable parties. His belief in money was just relieved by the faint touch of mysticism that is in snobbishness.

As he was the typical early Victorian, so Mr. Bultitude, in Mr. Anstey's incomparable *Vice Versa*, was the typical mid-Victorian. At intervals, in these delightful pages, we are reminded that Mr. Bultitude appreciated cigars and good cooking, but otherwise he loved money for its own sake, and his religion was respectability—the opinion of others. He regarded his children like monsters sent by fate to plague him and cause him expense. He suffered agonies of anxiety on the last day of the holidays lest an accident should prevent his son Dick from returning to school. He looked aggrieved at the boy's



## THE VICTORIAN AGE

request for pocket-money. "If I did give you money you'd only go and spend it", he said, as if money were a work of art. "I suppose you must have some", he concludes, "though you cost me enough, Heaven knows, without this additional expense"; and, in the unimaginative Victorian fashion of one law for the old and another for the young, he produces a handful of gold and silver whence he selects a florin, two shillings, and two sixpences, as "a handsome allowance for a young fellow". Dick's expression of distaste for Dr. Grimstone's school causes a further clash of opinion. Mr. Bultitude thinks that the "extras" for which he pays, such as "dancing" and "meat for breakfast" should compensate for anything. In the enforced disguise of his son he hears some unpleasant truths about himself. The schoolmaster's wife had compared his heart to a money bag; and it was rumoured that he was a "brute" to his children. "If", he exclaims, "slaving from morning to night to provide education and luxuries for a thankless brood of unprofitable young vipers, is being a brute, I suppose he is!"<sup>1</sup>

It would be hard to discover a book with so much condensed Victorianism as *Vice Versa*. The first milestone on the road from transcendentalism is hero-worship, the second snobbishness, and the third respectability. The latter was Mr. Bultitude's god, and it also brings us within sight of modern realism and the creed of material efficiency, where the fire of the spirit is finally put out. At the outset, especially, of this "sinister passage", the mind was hopelessly divided against itself. The uneasiness which disturbs those whose principles and practice are at variance, was at its zenith,—and it was more widespread as business absorbed an increasing number of the population. No one in his heart can reconcile unstinted money-making with divine charity, but it is possible to persuade your neighbours that this

<sup>1</sup> The quotations are from memory as I have not the book at hand, but they should be accurate, as I have read *Vice Versa* at least a score of times.



## THE VICTORIAN AGE

miracle has been effected. The Victorian employer who sweated and bullied his employees all the days of the week was regularly to be seen at church on Sunday, probably acting as churchwarden. The business man is by nature unfriendly ; accustomed to competition and self-protection, he suspects evil rather than good in his fellow-creatures, and discovers their faults rather than appreciates their virtues. It is usual to say that men can be other in their lives and their professions, but experience is against this theory. No one succeeds in a profession without a natural impulse towards it, and no one's character can be unaffected by his daily pursuits prolonged into old age. The Victorian did not will to be other than he was, but, owing to faint remains of inherited transcendental memories, he willed to appear other before the world. The result was an elaborate system of checks and formulas to prevent the wild beast from breaking through. Outer ceremony and etiquette were a portent of Victorian times ; education consisted in training the young to observe the formal decencies of life, and suppress their true natures. Unnatural importance was attached to external observances—such as the wearing of mourning for deceased relations, with definite restrictions as to the time for reducing the width of crape bands, etc. Readers of Carlyle will remember his unwearied protests against “ formulas ”.

One of the lessons of spiritual experience is that true moral principles must have a transcendental origin.<sup>1</sup> The principles of the Victorians were made by man for man, and were therefore lifeless things. We are told that on days of festival at Mecca each class wears the dress of the class above it. The Victorian assumed like a garment those principles which he thought would make him appear worthy to the class just above his own. It

<sup>1</sup> See John Baillie, *The Interpretation of Religion*, pp. 342-353 ; F. R. Barry, *The Relevance of Christianity*, pp. 60, 112 ; Charles E. Raven, *Jesus and the Gospel of Love*, p. 29 ; A. E. Taylor, *Faith of a Moralist*, Vol. I, pp. 209, 351-2 ; Vol. II, pp. 163-4.

## THE VICTORIAN AGE

thus became inevitable that outward things rather than inward were his touchstone of goodness : not love but the ceremony of marriage, not true hospitality but the expensive entertainment, not friendship based on sympathy, but on the friend's social position, etc.<sup>1</sup> A further result was the beginning of that class estrangement which is still developing in our own day. The ancient distinctions of birth were absolute, but mitigated by the belief that all men are equal in the sight of God. Now that God has left the world, the mystery has departed from man, and we are all equal except in the amount of our material possessions. The struggle, therefore, is to get as much of these as we can, and we have reverted to the law of the jungle where might is right. Such is both our modern profession and practice, but the Victorian's profession was at variance with his practice. A thin crust of sentimentality and respectability was spread over an abyss of selfishness and materialism.

The commercialised Victorian had come to believe in his heart that nothing mattered except money, but he professed outwardly a lofty indifference to money, and never mentioned the subject in public. He was less concerned with moral truth than with what he ought to believe, to show the world he was a gentleman. There was nothing either good or bad, but other people's thinking made it so. Nowhere was this uncomfortable

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dickens and Bernard Shaw. Mr. Pegotty to Mrs. Steerforth : " Save her from this disgrace, and she shall never be disgraced by us. Not one of us that she's growed up among, not one of us that's lived along with her, and had her for their all in all these many year, will ever look upon her pritty face again ". This was a master-stroke of pathos to Victorians. We turn to Act I of *Man and Superman* : OCTAVIUS. " But who is the man ? He can make reparation by marrying her ; and he shall, or he shall answer for it to me ". RAMSDEN. " He shall, Octavius. There you speak like a man ". TANNER. " Then you don't think him a scoundrel, after all ? " OCTAVIUS. " Not a scoundrel ! He is a heartless scoundrel ". RAMSDEN. " A damned scoundrel. I beg your pardon, Annie ; but I can say no less ". TANNER. " So we are to marry your sister to a damned scoundrel by way of reforming her character ! "

## THE VICTORIAN AGE

dualism more apparent than in the education of children. As prophet of the Victorian Age, Carlyle voiced two of its perverted theories—the Gospel of Work, and the denial of the right to happiness. The mightiest brain cannot escape the contagion of its surroundings, and the mistake of Carlyle's life was his residence in London. In abandoning his native moors he abandoned his transcendental heritage. He reversed in himself the truth of Dr. Johnson's saying, that a Scotsman's finest prospect is the high road which leads him to England. In earlier years he had condensed the whole matter in the happy phrase about Burns's father, "who feared God but was fearless of men, and was therefore a complete man". If this type of character still remains, it is in the country districts of Scotland. Man does not live to work, but works to live and possess his soul. The earlier Victorians, still soul-haunted, may have seized on the idea of work as a palliative—as a means of postponing indefinitely the day of spiritual reckoning. With the mid-Victorians, such as Mr. Bultitude, the duty of work and denial of happiness became the excuse for seeking money for its own sake—to be accumulated, not enjoyed. Ruskin drew attention to three great forms of asceticism in the world : religious, military, monetary. The last is the refusal of pleasure and knowledge for the sake of money.

Woodrow Wilson, shortly before he died, is reported to have said that the greatest wrong one human being can do to another is to prevent him from enjoying his childhood. If this is true, and it has the ring of truth, the Victorian Age will take a low place in the history of world morals. In order to save his money and impress his children with the importance of money, the Victorian parent made them sharers from earliest years in his financial worries, and denied them childhood's legitimate pleasures. In so doing, he weakened their nerves and constitutions, lowered their vitality, deprived them of hope, and subjected them to long hours of ennui out of which grew morbid and unnatural thoughts. Since



## THE VICTORIAN AGE

God has left the world, he assumed the role of Creator—to whom his children owed their existence. Through constant reiteration of their duties of subjection and gratitude, he inoculated them with a sense of inferiority. Fear for his business and investments made him dwell unceasingly on the severe struggle he had endured to reach his present position, and the need of his children to work hard at school, and also in their holidays, to prepare themselves for future money-making. Thus, from the cradle, he cast over them the shadow of material care and made them anxious and apprehensive.

Like all unspiritual people, the Victorians only partially accepted the idea of death. A money-founded world is a great reality ; and death was so strange that, when it came, it filled the whole horizon like an exceptional portent rather than a common thing. The elder person, who was likely to die first, assumed an air of moral superiority over the younger whose fate was postponed. Parents urged the probability of remorse after their death to overcome disobedient children. That their children would also die, that we are all "sentenced to death"—as Victor Hugo says—that everyone will die who has ever known us, that in a few years there will be no trace or recollection of us on this planet,—that the earth itself will eventually disappear and leave not a wrack behind,—all this was foreign to their conception. Mrs. Carlyle remarked that one of her uncles in Liverpool seemed more interested in his children as the future inheritors of his possessions than for themselves. This illustrates Victorian belief that money is the grand link between the generations, that this world is a continuing city, that to-morrow will be like to-day, that life is a safe thing. That the world exists over an abyss into which one day will vanish all its big businesses and insurance offices and premiums and policies, its banks and city companies and corporations and Stock Exchanges, even its manufactures and export trade,—all this was outside the realm of the practical, and, if the thought were per-

## THE VICTORIAN AGE

sisted in, might weaken the impulse to make money. Morley, as social reformer, bade us follow the man of action who lives as if he would never die,—and thrust aside, like something immoral, the thought which meditation has taught in all ages, that this outer world does not truly exist.

Events have proved our world not to be the safe place it seemed to the Victorians. The Great War, the Russian Revolution, the threat to Europe of Bolshevism—these things have staggered humanity. The first Victorians failed to hand on the transcendental torch, and the spark of religion, surviving fitfully in hero-worship, and dying slowly through snobbishness and respectability, has now gone out. Man is simply the most active part of this planet, only to be distinguished from his fellows by the amount of his material possessions : and these can be added or withdrawn. Life has become a struggle between those who possess and those who do not : at one pole we find the business man, at the other the communist. Realism is not a particularly German thing, nor was it invented by Bismarck, as popularly supposed. It first arose in Germany when Frederick-William, the creator of modern Prussia, applied the methods of business to politics ; but it has existed since the days when business men assembled in a market. Before the nineteenth century, business played a small part in a nation's life, and was shunned by the high born and highly educated. With the coming of the Victorian Age, the stream grew progressively larger, and has now overflowed into all classes, so that the prevailing mentality is that of the business man. Civilisation has been called a paradox—based on the avoidance of unpleasant facts. To the business man, fact is the beginning and end of all things ; he sees life as it is, not as it should be. He thrusts aside all sentiment, follows his thought to its logical conclusion, and frankly recognises the acquisitive and bestial element in human nature. He scoffs at the arts and academic pursuits, at religion, at the military profession—at every-



## THE VICTORIAN AGE

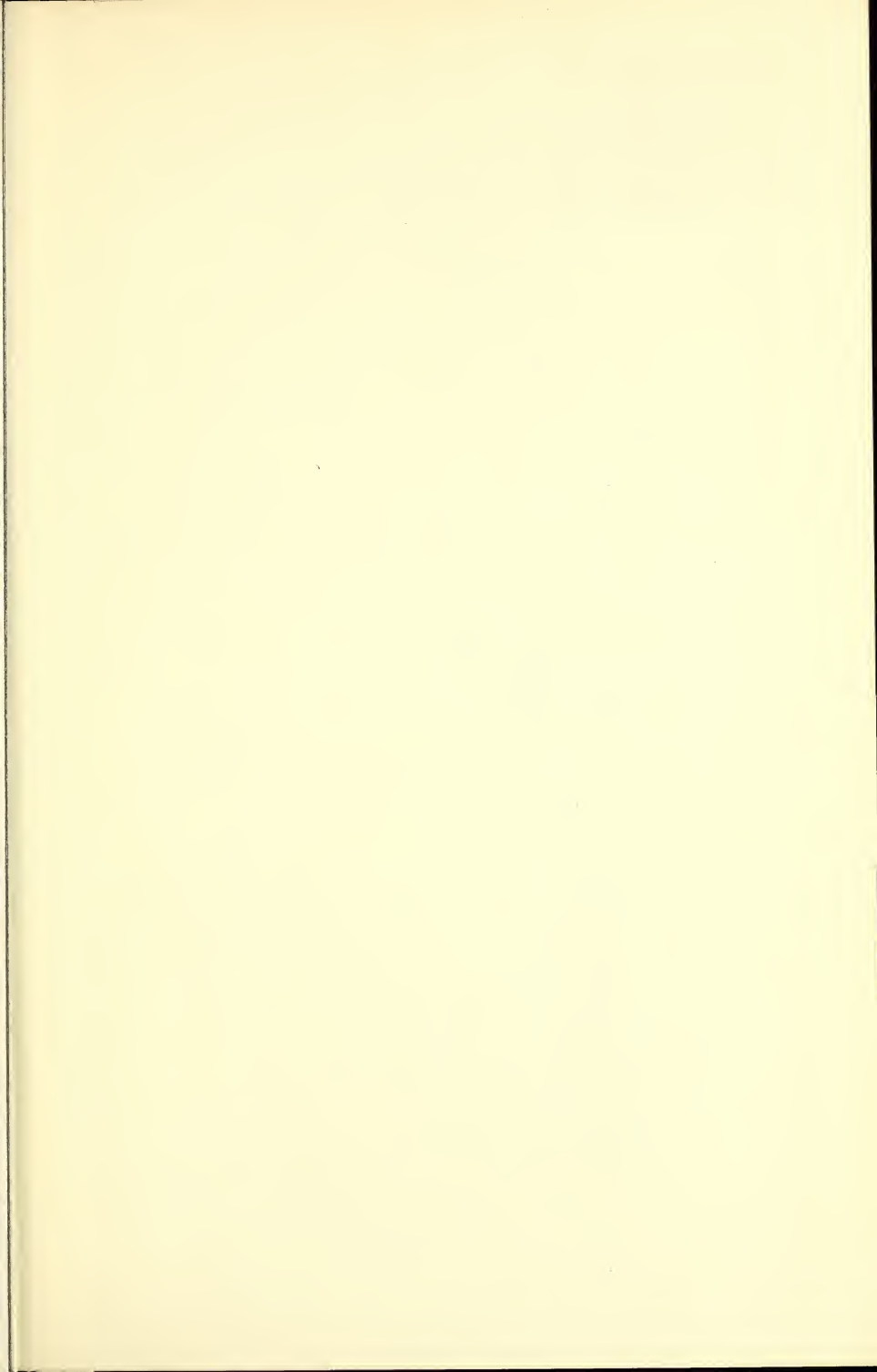
thing which is non-money-making, and has an ideal or self-sacrificing character. Unlike his grandfather, he is utterly disillusioned, and cares nothing for the world's good opinion. He rejects all that previous generations of culture have won with toil and pain from the chaos of primeval nature. He is thus becoming a danger to manners, morals, decency, to civilisation itself.

The transcendental spring has failed, and humanity, left to itself, generates realism : but we must not end on a despairing note, and already faint signs of better things appear. What is thought by the most advanced minds of to-day is thought by the multitude to-morrow. The materialistic science of the nineteenth century was a portent of the coming materialisation of the people. May we not hope that the sound arguments which the best writers on morals and religion are now using to prove that man and nature are incomprehensible apart from transcendentalism, are a portent of the future ?













820.9  
R163l  
1968  
c.2

Later critiques. main  
820.9R163l 1968 C.2



3 1262 03385 5080

